This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

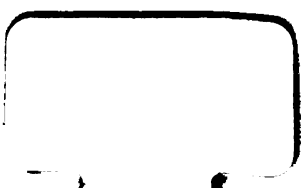
HN 1IGK 9

The CASTLE of DOUBT

JOHN H. WHITSON

Digitized by Google

K1013489



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE CASTLE OF DOUBT

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# of Doubt

BY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE
Castle of Doubt

BY

JOHN H. WHITSON

AUTHOR OF "THE RAINBOW CHASERS," "BARBARA, A WOMAN OF THE WEST," ETC.

With a Frontispiece in Color from a Drawing by I. H. Caliga

Boston
Little, Brown, and Company
1907

Digitized by Google

KD 13089

Copyright, 1907,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

All rights reserved

Published May 1907

Printers
S. J. PARKHILL & CO., BOSTON, U. S. A.

Digitized by Google

"For Lovers were Liars ever."

— OLD SONG

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Fillip to Curiosity	1
II.	I Learn about Myself	14
III.	In the Castle of Doubt	22
IV.	The Dissembler	37
V.	Back from the Dead	51
VI.	When the Fates were Crazy	63
VII.	In the Fool's Paradise	73
VIII.	Introduces the Villain	79
IX.	The Reception	95
X.	Courtney Lane threatens	111
XI.	Powder in my Pistol	117
XII.	Asbury Rand	125
XIII.	The Joint in my Armor	131
XIV.	Pursued	147
XV.	"Was ever Woman in this Humour wooed?"	163
XVI.	The Officer from New York	173
XVII.	Under the Jolly Roger	183
XVIII.	Disquieting Fears	193

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	Mrs. Randolph in Command	203
XX.	A Declaration of War	218
XXI.	The Bolt from the Blue	229
XXII.	A Hero to his Master	242
XXIII.	Crimson against Blue	256
XXIV.	A Metamorphosed Past	268
XXV.	Love and the Soul-Sleepers	275

Digitized by Google

The Castle of Doubt

I

A FILLIP TO CURIOSITY

"JULIAN!"

A witching voice called the name, and a witching face looked out at me from the carriage that had drawn up at the curb.

I had observed the carriage but a moment before — one of those brilliant equipages that roll so noiselessly along the driveways of Central Park that you hear only the rhythmical tattoo of the hoofs of the shining horses.

One who is still reasonably young and impressionable may I think be pardoned a quickening of the pulse-beats when addressed in that way by the possessor of such a voice and face, even though he has no recollection of ever having heard the one or seen the other, and his name is not Julian.

In addition, the spirit of Spring, which puts a fuller crimson on the robin's breast, had touched the world and me. I had been feeling its jaunty lightness and bubbling effervescence,

Digitized by Google

and the earth seemed young, in spite of the fact that I had that very morning spent a whole half-hour pondering by the big Egyptian obelisk and trying to make myself feel that the world is very, very old indeed. Hence, when that voice and those eyes called to me I was ready to accept their invitation.

There were two young women in the carriage. The driver had brought the horses up with a sharp turn and the footman had leaped to the ground. There was laughing delight in the eyes of the Nymphs, I was sure. Or were they Sirens, rather than Nymphs?

The tang of the air, the flashing of sunlight on the polished green of leaves, the crunch of stamping hoofs, a bird-note in the near-by branches, and the beckoning of a musical voice and of moist blue eyes! Romance still disports itself as freely as when Cleopatra put rouge on her olive cheeks and steered her purple-sailed and scented galleys out to meet Antony. Antony yielded, as mere man always does when lovely woman stoops to conquer, and as I am quite ready to confess that I did in this instance.

"Julian!" the voice called again, more insistent.

"Yes?" I answered, lifting my hat and stepping lightly toward the carriage.

Digitized by Google

"Julian, this is delightful! Come, please, before people begin to stare at us."

It was the nymph with the eyes of blue who said this. The other was a nut-brown maid a trifle younger, with a general "tan" effect which extended from her gloves to her cheeks. I thought she was laughing roguishly. In the eyes of blue was a look I could not fathom; yet, to my surprise, I fancied I detected a tear. At the moment the whole thing seemed a part of a play, such as I had witnessed the night before in one of the metropolitan theatres.

I was not quite prepared for what followed. One never is, I think, when the happening falls the least bit out of the ordinary.

The footman gave me a push and a lift, just as if he were a kidnapper and I the child of a millionaire pork packer worth a fabulous ransom. This was so unexpected that I fairly fell into the carriage, and into the lap of the nymph with the eyes of blue. Then my heart leaped; for she put her arms round my neck and began to kiss me with a rapture surpassing that of the most emotional of actresses.

"I think I shall enjoy this immensely, if you will but give me breathing space," I said, bewildered, yet determined to carry it off as lightly as I could.

Digitized by Google

"How could you? How could you?" she demanded.

"My recollection assures me that I was assisted," was my answer, as I placed myself in an easier and more satisfying posture. "But, then, such assistance is a delight. Where is the Castle?"

"The Castle?"

"To which I am now to be taken. I think you must be the Princess I saw in the play last night, and I the Wounded Knight. Of course you will treat me well when you get me there! But I can stand even a donjon-keep, I assure you, if you will but stay close by me."

I freed myself and looked at Her. But for the brilliant flush of her cheeks, her face was white, too white, due I thought to the sombre hue of her clothing.

"What, crying?" I said. "Forgive my levity. You can't expect me to take this thing seriously, though. And for Heaven's sake, tell me just what is the meaning of our play-acting? I am willing to be Knight (Wounded, or otherwise) to two such charming Princesses. And I admit I am hard hit, if not sorely wounded. But even a Wounded Knight may be allowed curiosity."

"Julian, this is not play-acting!"

Digitized by Google

"No?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what is it?"

"We are taking you home."

I sat up straighter and looked at her even more intently. My face must have revealed the puzzled state of my mind.

"And now that I have found you, you shall never, never go away again!" she declared.

I gasped my amazement.

"Home!" cried the Adorable One to the driver, in a voice of liquid sweetness. (It was really liquid — she was crying!)

The horses gave a jump, the carriage swung round, and we were rolling swiftly toward the city.

My emotions ran the gamut. The jerk of the carriage had thrown me heavily against the cushions, and the woman who had captured me (I felt at the moment that I had been captured) was declaring what wild nonsense I knew not.

I was aware that the other nymph was uttering sundry ejaculations that seemed almost hysterical, but she at least did not throw her arms round my neck and kiss me!

"I don't know that I ought to object to this, since it is so pleasant," I said, trying hard to be humorous. "Still, if I may be permitted a

Digitized by Google

question, I should be pleased, like the congressman of refreshing memory, to know just 'where we are at'?"

"Julian," She answered, "we can't discuss the matter now. I think I understand." (I was sure I did not!) "You are my husband, and you are going home with me."

Good Heavens! Her husband! I gave a jump of astonishment.

"Of course I am nothing of the kind," I replied. "You must have a reason, though, for saying it. And also, of course, it is a weighty one."

But my levity had grown a little heavy.

"I have the best of reasons. It is true. And you are going home with me."

"And then what?" I asked.

"You are to remain with me — for ever and ever."

"But if," I cried — "if you discover that I am *not* your husband — that this is a mistake? I haven't the pleasure at this moment of being the husband of any woman. It is my loss, I know, and —"

"We will not discuss the matter, Julian!"

Though sweet and kindly, the tone was final.

"Julian what?" I asked irrelevantly, when shunted thus into a side-track.

Digitized by Google

"Randolph, of course. Have you forgotten your own name?"

"If that is my name, I certainly have," I answered. "The last time I took stock of my personal belongings my name was Louis Armitage."

"I think I understand," she said, calmly.

I stared at her, and at the girl of tan who was abetting her. Again for the moment I was sure I had been chosen as the hero of some little comedy whose denouement I could not guess.

"Very well," I said, once more trying to be humorous. "Does Sherry's lie at the end of the road, or does —"

"I think I said that we are going home, Julian."

We were soon rolling through the vista of brownstone mansions on Upper Fifth Avenue. I glanced at the driver and footman, sedate and wooden in their places; and at the young women, and was conscious of a disquieting air of reality. Romance was more at home on the parkway boulevard than where the city's architectural precision seemed devised with the special view of banishing it.

"I am enjoying the present, anyway," I asserted, a bit nervously I fear. "I only wish I *were* Julian Randolph. I should like to con-

Digitized by Google

gratulate him for a lucky dog. And I shall always count it a piece of good fortune that I look so like him as to have deceived his charming wife and her equally charming friend."

The Charming Friend arched her eyebrows at me. And she had lovely brown eyes under those arched eyebrows I assure you. Still, she was far from being as beautiful, in my opinion at least, as Mrs. Julian Randolph.

I actually began to be jealous of Randolph. What did the despicable fellow mean? Had he abandoned this woman, and conducted himself in such an absurd manner that she felt she must abduct him as soon as she saw him if she meant to retain him at all? And then my mind, from such questions, leaped back to the conclusion that this was but play-acting. Though the purpose I could not fathom.

I began to ask more questions, to which there were more puzzling answers and protestations mingled with tears, and even more laughter from the nut-brown maid. Her name, I learned, was Margaret; or at least she was called that by Mrs. Randolph, and she was Mrs. Randolph's sister.

When the carriage stopped before one of the brownstone houses and the footman swung down to open the carriage door, I was as bewildered as in the beginning.

Digitized by Google

I could have laughed at the manner in which these women watched me as I stepped to the pavement, and at the cautious way in which the footman dropped in behind, like a rear-guard, as I moved, under their escort, toward the wide stone steps.

Now was my time to retreat; to fly, even. I confess to a moment of indecision. I know I was hoping that whatever did come of it, a further and better acquaintance with Kitty Randolph (was that her real name?) would result. And then? Well, I knew I should make the most of the possibilities of that acquaintance.

In the frame of mind of expecting anything, even the most unlikely, I was conducted, almost pulled, into the house. With the footman swinging in behind, as if to prevent my escape, that entrance hinted of feudal days and robber castles. I don't recall that history records any instance of a robber Princess sallying forth and capturing a husband. But it may have happened. Even history isn't argus-eyed. The reverse of that, however, has given history and fiction some of their most enchanting pages.

Disappointment awaited me within, for the house was modern. There were no cells, or prison doors. No grim jailer stood clanking

Digitized by Google

iron keys and rusty manacles. The carved and polished stair railing against which my shoulder was brushing was a work of art. Disgusted Romance could stand no more, but spread bright-hued wings and disappeared, to fly back to the park, and perhaps doze and dream again by the obelisk. I stood bewildered.

"And now," She said, still clinging to me, "I wish you would, or could, tell me why — why — why you vanished in that mysterious manner and left us to believe you were dead?"

She stood before me, young and charming. Her blue eyes had misty, mysterious depths. Excitement had colored her cheeks until they glowed — burned. Yet I saw that her complexion could boast the delicate tints of the pink sea-shell. She had intelligence, and that sweet femininity for which there are no words, or for which I at least have none adequate.

Her sister plucked from a silver tray a square envelope and tore it open with a snap.

"Jack will be here this evening," she said, as she glanced at the contents.

She was matter-of-fact, for she began to draw the pin out of her hat. Yes, Romance had flown back to the parkway and the obelisk. I looked at her. I had seen her picture — the Athletic American Girl. Her cheeks were

Digitized by Google

tanned; as she rolled back a glove I saw that her firm, hard wrists and hands were tanned; even her brown hair had a tint of sunshine.

I turned with as much nonchalance as I could to Mrs. Randolph.

"Now that you have caught me," I said brazenly, "let us end play-acting for a little while until you tell me what you intend to do with me."

Her fingers tightened on my arm.

"Keep you!" she cried with dramatic intensity.

"That will be delightful!" I declared with mock emphasis.

If I had been really her husband, as she asserted with such vehemence, it would have been Heaven to me, I began to realize, to be with her always. And this would have been true if, not being her husband, there were hopes that some day I might become her husband.

"I suppose you can't explain why you went away?" she urged, and I observed that the nut-brown maid listened for my answer.

"Not in the least," I said, resuming my tone of banter. "It is inexplicable. I shall never do so again."

"But you know where you have been?"

"Luckily, in Central Park this afternoon. I

Digitized by Google

must have been waiting for you, expecting you, though not aware of it."

"Don't jest, Julian!" she cried.

"I am not jesting," I declared, "though the situation seems worthy of it."

I was drawn into a small sitting room, richly furnished.

"Julian," she said, "you puzzle me. You seem to be jesting, and yet I know you can't be; for no man could jest under such circumstances. Unless —"

"Unless he was out of his mind?"

"Just so."

"Or chanced not to be the man he was supposed to be."

The nut-brown maid had vanished, but was returning, and I heard what seemed a stir of excitement among the servants. I began to feel that this was not a madcap's prank, but a case of mistaken identity. Julian Randolph was dead; I was supposed to be Julian Randolph; and this woman believed herself to be my wife. And I was reaching the quick realization that she was the One Woman intended for me of the gods.

Maid or widow, I determined quickly that I would win her. Yet as I registered the vow I realized how handicapped I was by my singu-

Digitized by Google

lar position. Then I began to feel that as an honest man my first duty was to undeceive her. I arose from my chair, hesitating.

The movement alarmed her. She had been reading my face, and thought I meant to depart.

"Julian," she exclaimed, "if you try to go I shall have the servants detain you!"

I laughed uneasily.

"You still insist that I am your husband?" I asked, looking into her serious eyes.

"Yes, of course."

"But if I insist with equal emphasis that I am not your husband, what then?"

Her answer came without hesitation:

"I shall know that I am right and that you are wrong."

"But you will admit that a man is likely to know who he is?"

"And you must admit that a woman is sure to know her own husband, even though for some reason he denies his identity!"

The silver bell of a clock tinkled somewhere.

"Be good now!" she said. "You will have barely time to dress for our early dinner. I will show you to your rooms, and your old valet will come to you at once. We're going to be just as we were in the old days, you know."

Digitized by Google

II

I LEARN ABOUT MYSELF

YOU will agree with me that to be in the home of a man who is dead, or supposed to be dead, and to have his wife (or his widow) believe that you are her husband, returned to her, is no ordinary experience. If the woman is of compelling loveliness the experience is no more strange perhaps; yet that circumstance certainly adds to its strength if, as in my case, you find yourself at once madly, overwhelmingly in love with her.

What was I to do? I was resolved to win her. I had tried, facetiously and feebly enough, to enlighten her. She had not believed. And there was something in her manner which assured me she would never believe. I could fly from the house, out into the street, and there lose myself; or flee from the city; but even then she would not believe. The light which had come into those sapphire eyes would be quenched by my act, and the heart that had throbbed so tumultuously against my own would be torn by unspeakable anguish. She

Digitized by Google

would search for me, would grieve for me; and she would not believe. And — I should lose her forever!

Am I a villain? Hear me to the end, and see.

I had been shown to the rooms which were said to be mine. They contained everything to make for comfort. Pipes and tobacco jars, and fragrant Havanas, so old and dry that they were flaky and powdery to the touch, invited me. As I prowled curiously about, like a cat in a strange garret, I even found a little sideboard, with glasses, a case of wine and some bottles of champagne and whiskey. A glance into another room revealed fencing foils, pistols, a hammerless shotgun, and a desk of books. A cleanly disorder was everywhere, as if the owner had departed intending to return soon, and never having done so they had been kept as left with scrupulous care. I confess it gave me a queer feeling.

I looked at myself in a long pier glass, and saw there a young man, beardless, with brown, well-meaning eyes, a pleasant though not a particularly handsome face, a firm mouth, a chin which for the first time I fancied indicated a trace of weakness, abundant dark hair, and a well-knit figure.

Digitized by Google

I was contemplating this picture when I felt a presence.

As I turned, a soft-footed man stood before me; a young man, of about my own age, with an English cast of countenance. He was speaking to me:

"Will you have a shave, sir, before dinner?"

I looked in the mirror again, to assure myself that this was not a dream, and rubbed my hand across my chin.

"Will we have time?" I asked, dubiously.

"I think so, sir."

He began to bring clothing from a side room.

"Just as you left them, sir!" he said, with deep meaning.

There was a slight flush on his white, clean face. Yet his hands, white, with long, clean fingers and polished nails, did not tremble.

I hesitated; then moved to the chair he indicated.

"Tell me," I said, as I took my seat and he began to tuck the immaculate shaving towel under my chin, "did you — were you the valet of — that is, *my* valet, before —"

"Yes, sir," he said, with rare understanding, lifting my chin that he might set the towel better in place. "After you disappeared I wished to remain with the family, and became under butler."

Digitized by Google

The swift assurance of his answer was enough to make my brain whirl.

"When did I — disappear?"

"A year ago last autumn, sir, near the close of the season. I remember it well, sir; and it seems a miracle to have you here, and me be getting ready to shave you. Indeed it does, sir."

I wanted to look him in the face again, to see if he were joking; but he was holding my head to one side, as he went on with his preparations.

"I was supposed to be dead?" I stammered.

"Yes, sir; just so, sir. They buried you."

"*Buried me?*"

"It was not you, sir, of course, as we know now; but they buried some one they thought was you. I myself thought it was you. And, sir, you could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard that you had returned and was not dead at all, and — Does my hand shake, sir?"

This was overwhelming, and I lay still a moment.

"Have I changed any? In appearance, I mean."

"Very little, sir. You are thinner; but that is to be expected, sir."

Digitized by Google

He stood off and looked at me; and, turning my head, I now looked him full in the face. He was apparently in sober earnest, his manner softened by the tremendous discovery that his old master, whom he had seen dead and buried, was still in the flesh, and was there, in the old room, talking with him and getting ready for dinner, as in the old days.

"Just how have I changed?"

"That is all," he said — "about all, sir; you are thinner, your hair seems a bit stiffer and harsher — it has not had proper attention, I fear; your face is not quite so dark, because it is not so tanned. You were a very tanned man, sir; from the wind, on the yachting trips, you know, and from exposure to the weather while golfing and autoing. But, really, sir, the change is inconsiderable. I should have known you in an instant anywhere; even in —" he hesitated for a word to express remoteness, then fell back on the old, familiar — "in China, sir."

"What am I to call you?" I asked, when I had digested this; and I wondered what he would think of the question as I put it.

"Jerome, sir — Jerome Barnard. Your memory is not very good, sir."

His tone acknowledged that, while he had

Digitized by Google

expected nothing else, it hurt him to have received no more.

"It was bad before — before I went away?"

"No, sir; I think not, sir."

He had lathered my face, and was stropping the razor, whacking it sharply against the leather.

"Tell me about it," I said, as he came back to me and began to draw the keen blade over my cheek.

"Yes, sir. We were in Maine, you know, at Camden-by-the-Sea. We had gone there in the *Idler*."

"That's the name of the yacht?"

"Yes, sir; glad to see that you remember her, sir. We had gone by the way of Newport, Boston, and York Harbor, stopping at each place for a short time. The *Idler* is out of commission now; Mrs. Randolph would have nothing more to do with her."

"Go on," I urged. The whole affair was really getting on my nerves.

"Yes, sir." He turned my head, and applied the razor to the other cheek. "We had been there two or three weeks. Camden is a beautiful place, you know, with the mountains just by it and the bay in front, and *The Poplars* is a handsome estate. Yet I remember that you

Digitized by Google

became restless, sir, and talked about going to Bar Harbor. You went down to the *Idler*, to see the captain about it; and that was the last that we saw of you, sir. You took the boat, to pull off to the yacht; or, we supposed that you did. It was the yacht's boat, and had been left for you, so that you could go aboard when you liked. It was found next day, sir, on the shore, overturned."

"And —"

"Yes, sir; the body that we supposed was yours was found on the Lincolnville beach, two months later. Of course the time that had elapsed, sir, made complete identification impossible; but no one doubted that the body was yours; I did not, sir."

"Mrs. Randolph doubted?"

"Perhaps she did, sir; I have heard that she did. I have heard that she never would believe but that you had wandered away in a fit of mental aberration. But no one else thought so, sir; none of the servants thought so."

For a while I lay thinking quietly.

"Did Mrs. Randolph make further search afterward?"

"I have heard that she did, sir; that was the talk among the servants. I never heard her speak of it."

Digitized by Google

"And it was generally accepted that the body found was Julian Randolph's?"

"Yes, sir."

"The thing must have made quite a stir at the time?"

"It did, sir."

The very queerness of the situation gave me a strange feeling. If I had not recalled my own past so well, had not known just what I was doing yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, with recollections running back over the months and years, I might have begun to doubt my own identity. I wanted to shake myself at intervals, to make sure that I was not dreaming.

I hesitated again, as he brought out clothing; then decided with reckless haste to go ahead and see what would come of this queer adventure. He assisted me into the clothing he provided, and I found that I was fitted to perfection.

As I went down to dinner I saw him smiling in what I thought an odd way, and it flashed on me that perhaps he was deep in some plot against me. And this impression increased as I descended the stairs.

Digitized by Google

III

IN THE CASTLE OF DOUBT

MRS. RANDOLPH was waiting for me at the entrance to the spacious dining room. Though there was a soft-bulbed electric light in the hall, a firefly caught in the calyx of a lily, the broad branches of the palm by which she stood shadowed her face and gave an unfathomable depth to her eyes.

She was dressed somewhat soberly, as she had been that afternoon, as a woman naturally would be whose husband was not two years dead. Yet as I joined her I observed that her face was radiant and that her eyes were bright as stars.

"Julian!" she cried.

The tone was low, with a rapturous catching of the breath. With that clouding suspicion in my mind it further bewildered me. My face flushed, embarrassment seized me, and I became a prisoner in the Castle of Doubt.

But by an effort I got control of myself, and resumed the light air which so far had served me well when talking with her. And again the

Digitized by Google

marvellous beauty and charm of the woman captured my will and forced me to go forward.

"I am enjoying this so thoroughly," I declared, "that I am glad I did not go away."

She gave me a strange, quick, startled look. The color fled from her cheeks, to return instantly with added brilliance.

"Shall we go in?" she asked gently.

"Yes," I said. "This is even better than Sherry's, for the crowd is absent."

I swept the interior of the dining room at a glance as she took my arm. My trepidation increased on discovering that two persons were present in addition to the servants. One of these was Margaret Hansborough, Mrs. Randolph's nut-brown sister. The other was a young man whom I had not yet seen. They had been sitting by a window, and rose hurriedly together as we entered.

Resolving to see this thing through, I was being plunged into deeper and yet deeper depths. Apparently, the way out — if there was a way out — was to go straight ahead. And straight ahead I went, feeling the soft hand on my arm clutching with singular and tremulous earnestness. If these women were playing a part —

My eyes met those of Miss Hansborough with

Digitized by Google

a sharp and searching glance. She was smiling, even radiant, yet I did not think she was smiling at me. On her tanned cheeks was a flush, of joy apparently in her sister's restored happiness. Her brown eyes held shifting and uncertain lights. Just now they were sparkling. Her smile displayed her white, even teeth. Health and vitality radiated from her. Here was a girl, I saw, to whom the mere joy of living was a supreme pleasure.

I expected that the smooth-faced, athletic young man with her would be introduced to me; but he bounded forward, with almost a college yell, and catching my hand squeezed it until it ached. You see, he knew me, even though I did not know him; he was Jack Benson, and Margaret Hansborough's fiancé. I (that is, not I, but Julian Randolph) had known him well — we had been close friends. Benson was a student at Harvard, I learned later, and Randolph a Harvard graduate; and that was another tie, in addition to the very obvious one that Randolph had married one Hansborough sister and Benson expected to marry the other.

I said nothing, in answer to his exclamations of delight, even though he capered so boyishly. Yet I could not remain silent, and it seemed

Digitized by Google

impossible to retreat. I was like a driven pig in an alley. If I balked the devil would be to pay. There was nothing to do but to dash wildly ahead and see what came of it.

Whatever came of it, I should for a while be near the woman who had filched my heart. There are times when a man will sell his chances of Heaven for the glance of a woman's eyes, and I think that time came for me then. That story of the hairy brother, the mess of pottage and the birthright applies to all of us.

So I took the desperate leap; and the next moment I was answering Jack Benson's exclamations and questions (strangely there were very few questions!) to the best of my ability, and it was a very limited ability just then. Though his voice rang clear, there was a serious look in his eyes, as if he knew he faced a serious situation but was resolved to go through it with credit.

I have said his questions were few; they were also innocuous.

"I hope you are well?" he began.

"Never better," I answered, trying to respond easily to this easy one.

I wondered if my voice sounded like Julian Randolph's. I had forgotten to ask that of the valet.

Digitized by Google

I slipped into the chair which the servant pushed under me at the table. Observing that I had the seat of McGregor, it broke on me with overwhelming force that I was recognized as the head of the house.

"Well, I'm glad to see you!" Benson declared again.

He beamed upon me, and the two women did the same.

Then he looked at the girl opposite him, as if thinking that never could he have remained away from Miss Hansborough after the manner of Julian Randolph. But alas, my thought was, how could poor Randolph help it, when he was dead?

"I stand condemned for heartlessness," I answered, speaking to the unvoiced question.

I began to feel easier, for I perceived by a sort of intuition that this master of the house in whose seat I sat had been a wealthy eccentric whose doings were unaccountable to everybody and therefore I was not to be pressed hard to explain my supposed singular conduct. But in a moment Jack Benson had started again, and he now had me guessing.

"That last plunge of yours was into Africa; perhaps you returned to your old stamping ground there and brought down some new kind

Digitized by Google

of wild beast, maybe an okapi, with those soft-nosed bullets you told me about? You remember them?"

"Oh, I remember them!" I cried desperately. "Yes, I found new game. You can't know how interesting it was."

I felt that I was becoming as brazen as the dining room clock, which seemed trying hard to stare me out of countenance. Likely it was ashamed of me, for as I finished that "whopper" its bell tinkled, as much as to say, "Ring off!"

But I was listening for the voice of Mrs. Randolph; and I heard it now, liquid as water, yet vibrant, and sweet as the note of a bird:

"It was — just a little strange. We'll all understand it better by and by."

Mrs. Randolph was watching me attentively, while trying to appear not to be doing so, and the quick color was coming and going in her cheeks, which at one moment were pale and the next a rich carmine. Miss Hansborough alone seemed cool, and a look into her smiling face had for me the effect of a breath from glacial heights.

"When I got back from Africa," I said, "I felt so lost without the familiar African atmosphere that I began to haunt the obelisk

Digitized by Google

over in Central Park. It was near there that they found me, you know."

I addressed the remark to Benson.

"Of course you noticed the little ibises that stroll and teeter all over the thing," he said, irreverently, drawing an outline of one in mid-air with his fork. "Somehow, they make me think of the swan boats in the Public Gardens, in Boston."

Miss Hansborough laughed, and I felt better.

"How absurd!" she cried.

"I think I saw the originals of those birds on the banks of the Serpent Nile," I declared. "They looked old enough for it, any way. But the Nile wasn't green, as I always thought; there was too much mud in it."

"From the new cuttings and dams at Assouan," said Jack, understandingly.

Pretty soon, I felt, I should be believing myself the man these generous people seemed to think me, so strong is the self-deceit of acting. Wasn't it the elder Booth who once became so imbued with the feeling of the character he was portraying that he nearly ran his antagonist through, forgetting for the moment that he was engaged in only a stage duel? I was but an amateur, yet was becoming as obsessed as Booth had ever been.

Digitized by Google

"But the Nile boats are as picturesque as ever," I went on, "and the boatmen and fellaheen quite as dirty and thieving."

The words came trippingly, and in imagination I saw the sunlight on the date palms and the plodding of the desert camels, as well as fellaheen, beggars and Nile boats.

"Were you over there long?" Benson asked.

"Ages," I answered, smiling at him.

Mrs. Randolph studied my face with a quick and comprehensive glance.

"You haven't been back a great while?" she said.

"Not half long enough to get re-acquainted with myself. I'm so Egyptianized that even my words stumble. I know the height of the Pyramid of Gizeh a good deal better than that of the Goddess of Liberty down here in the harbor."

"You haven't been long in New York?" she went on, with a certain sweet and tremulous persistence.

I ask the discriminating reader if this was not sufficiently puzzling to muddle a man of the levelest head?

"Not very long," I answered, evasively.

"How long?"

Driven thus into a corner, I tried to get out of it humorously, and floundered.

Digitized by Google

"About five feet ten," I said, mentioning my height, for I could think of no suitable reply.

Though the answer was so witless, Miss Hansborough laughed again in her jolly, generous way, and I smiled her my gratitude.

"Thanks!" I cried to her. "We, at least, shall get on famously."

"Think so?" she said, and arched her eyebrows at me again in the way that I remembered and thought piquant and vivacious.

"I'm sure of it," I declared.

"That's good; for you know I always liked you, Julian."

"And I simply adored you!" I asserted; whereupon she flushed and became even prettier than before.

"My adoration of pretty women explains why I am here," I added.

My comprehensive glance covered both her and her sister.

"Mr. Benson," I said, turning to him in desperation, "when I was captured and brought here, I thought at first that the thing was a lark and that we were probably bound for a dinner at Sherry's, and perhaps the theatre later. But this is better than both. You agree with me?"

"I'm ready to agree with you in anything," he said, almost nervously.

Digitized by Google

"Then you'll agree with me, that when a man is captured in a public place by two pretty women, one of whom declares that she is his wife, and the other says she is his sister-in-law, and the intelligent young fellow at dinner begins to make queer remarks, thus abetting them, the situation is the oddest ever?"

I looked at him so level-eyed that his already flushed face colored still more.

"I should declare it unbelievable — a page out of a romantic novel," he answered, sitting back in his chair.

"And if the young man thus captured was so puzzled by what he saw and heard that he wasn't sure if the thing were real or a bit of play-acting, what then?"

"I should call it two pages out of two novels."

He met my glance now and drew a question mark on the cloth with his fork. I thought the question mark was for the eyes of Miss Hansborough.

Apparently we had reached the end of the conversational tether, and so we were straying into inane paths and foolish circles that began nowhere and ended at the same place.

At length, in spite of her flow of volatile spirits, Miss Hansborough seemed to feel a growing tension. She broke a red rosebud and

Digitized by Google

its spray of green from the cluster before her, with a nervous shake of her tanned fingers.

"Jack," she said brightly, as if continuing a conversation that had been dropped, while she fastened the rosebud in her dark hair, "when that Harvard-Yale game is played I shall wear a bunch of these as big as a plate—for Harvard, you know. They're not exactly crimson, but—"

"That will be bully!" Jack commended, with over-earnestness. "We'll all wear soup-plate bouquets of red roses."

She broke off a full-blown rose and waved it over her head.

"And we'll 'Rah, rah, rah' for 'Fair Harvard' until we're hoarse!"

"And if Harvard wins, we'll burn red fire in the yard and paint the statue of old John Harvard a brilliant crimson!" Jack added.

"*If* we win? Jack, you're no Harvard man, if you doubt!"

"Then I don't doubt!" he cried. "We'll win; of course we'll win."

All seemed relieved by this change in the current of talk. Having caught his cue, and feeling more at his ease, Jack, with Margaret, rattled on about the coming Harvard-Yale game, in which he was to have a part and in which all of us were assumed to be intensely interested.

Digitized by Google

Having come into the dining room with the talk of the valet in my ears and a sudden suspicion of him in my heart, this suspicion had for a time extended to Jack Benson. But he, showing now the true enthusiasm of a youthful undergraduate, did not fit my preconception of a man acting a part. And all of Benson's accessories seemed too realistic, from the loving glow and anxious attitude of Mrs. Randolph and the bright girlishness of Miss Hansborough to the quiet deference of the soft-footed servants. I felt that it was I who was playing a part, not these people, and my embarrassment, my sense of guilt and confusion, grew at the thought.

Yet now, as before, I seemed driven on, in a path I had not chosen and whose end I could not foresee. So while I studied the situation I continued to force myself to talk, forced myself to eat, forced myself to an interest in college games and college gossip, and even into an unnatural and unfelt gayety. I was aware that Mrs. Randolph watched me closely, not as if she doubted me, but as with a rapture tempered by fears.

The courses were served and the dinner came to an end. It was not long, I suppose, and the conversation was as bright, and after the begin-

Digitized by Google

ning, personally as colorless as the wit and high spirits of Miss Hansborough and Jack Benson could make it; yet it was to me interminable, and in some respects painful; and I was glad to rise from the table.

Benson was speaking to Miss Hansborough when Mrs. Randolph linked her arm lovingly in mine.

"We're going right back to the old ways, Julian," she whispered, giving my arm a passionate pressure. "Shall we have some music now, or would you prefer to smoke with Jack in the library?"

"The music," I answered, helplessly, after a moment of hesitation.

"Margaret plays and sings even better than before, I think," she said.

She turned to Miss Hansborough.

"Margaret, Julian thinks he would like to hear you sing."

My head felt giddy as we went into the music room, where Miss Hansborough seated herself at the piano, with Jack Benson leaning over her and assisting her in running through some sheets of music.

"Rag time is my favorite," Benson announced, youthfully, as he produced something from the pile.

Digitized by Google

I sat with Mrs. Randolph near one of the deep, mullioned windows. The curtains of filmy lace served somewhat as a screen, for which I was not sorry. I began to feel the need of a much more impenetrable screen to hide my growing sense of confusion and guilt. Behind that screen Mrs. Randolph drew one of my hands into her own warm, soft palms, and it seemed to me that a threat of tears blurred her eyes. Yet for all that they held a look of contentment.

Adaptability to all sorts of singular situations and circumstances I had thought one of my strong points, yet here adaptability and the self-command necessary to play my part were both breaking down.

Miss Hansborough ignored Benson's invitation to "rag time," struck a deep chord from the piano, and played a waltz.

When, in response to Mrs. Randolph's request, she began to sing, I discovered that she had a contralto voice of much sweetness and strength. Benson hovered over her, turning the sheets of the music. Now and then they had their heads together, and I fancied that they were speaking of me. When a little later, after a whispered conversation with Benson, Miss Hansborough began to sing one of the old songs,

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Randolph's hands tightened on mine with a nervous clutch:

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas! Douglas!
In the old likeness that I knew;
I'd be so loving, so faithful, Douglas —
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!"

I felt Mrs. Randolph shiver strangely, and now there were real tears in her eyes. I was almost angry with Miss Hansborough and Jack Benson. For the moment I doubted no longer. Strange though it seemed, Mrs. Randolph believed that I was her husband, Julian Randolph, returned to her; Death had relented and given back her dead! A deep pity struggled with my self-contempt. And she was so young and so beautiful; I longed to take her in my arms, fold her tightly to my breast, and tell her that though I was not her husband I already loved her more than her husband ever could have loved her, and that I had even registered a vow to make her my wife. Such was the effect on me of her beauty and her distress.

Digitized by Google

IV

THE DISSEMBLER

MISS HANSBOROUGH was again turning the pages of her music. But Mrs. Randolph was considerate. No doubt she wished to spare herself as well as me.

"Perhaps you would enjoy a cigar in the library," she suggested, with a sweet kindness that held yet a quiver of regret — regret that I should be separated from her for even a little while.

I managed to stammer that it would be a pleasure. Miss Hansborough looked at us, with a glance at Benson.

"Julian thinks he would enjoy a cigar in the library," said Mrs. Randolph, rising, her hand trembling as it rested for an instant on my shoulder, trembling as it seemed to me with the mere pleasure of having here at home again the husband she had mourned as dead.

Benson produced a package of little Havanas from somewhere as we passed into the library, and with them some matches, which he extended to me.

Digitized by Google

"Thanks!" I said, nervously.

I walked over to a window, and looked down into the lighted avenue, questioning what I should do. The "clock-clock" of beating hoofs of carriage horses rose to the window. From farther off came the subdued roar of the Elevated, the grumble of cable cars, and the jar of the city's traffic. Long lines of flashing lights made jewelled ropes in the darkness.

It was hard to realize that a few hours before I had not known there was such a woman in the world as Mrs. Julian Randolph, nor such a house as this brownstone mansion on Fifth Avenue. The man who came now to my side, and looked with me out on those shining lights, had been to me then as if he had not existed. What a world may open before us at any moment! A turn of the road, a step, and it is there, with all its interesting and mysterious novelty.

"It's been a fine day," said Benson, obviously groping for something to say.

"And Mrs. Randolph is a fine woman!" was my irrelevant answer.

That must have struck him strangely, for he gave me a quick, sharp look.

"Very!" he said.

"Have you — er — known her — been ac-

Digitized by Google

quainted with her — very long?" I blundered, unable to conceal my feverish interest.

"Two years," he said; "just about two years. Margaret — that is, Miss Hansborough — was visiting friends in Cambridge. I met her — chanced to see her, you know — and succeeded in getting an introduction."

That was six months or so before the time of the singular disappearance of Julian Randolph, according to the information given me by the valet.

Benson had answered fully, but as if prompting one who ought to know, and he seemed, or pretended to seem, puzzled. He did not need to tell me the rest. Having succeeded in getting an introduction to Miss Hansborough, he had continued successfully the acquaintance thus begun. So the fellow had courage and persistence! But his face had already told me that. Miss Hansborough had courage and persistence, too, as I had seen. I wondered vaguely how they would get on together when they were married.

I noticed now that though Benson had furnished the cigars he was not smoking. He held a cigar in his fingers, but he had not lighted it, and presently he laid it on the table. He observed that I regarded this with suspicion; and, indeed, the thought had flashed on me that

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Randolph had but banished me to the library that she might gain a few minutes in which to confer with Miss Hansborough as to the next steps to be taken in this little comedy-drama.

But Benson proceeded to enlighten me.

"I have to cut 'em out while in training," he said, simply.

He continued to stare into the street.

"I rather like the noise here," he remarked, as he thus looked from the window. "I mean out in the city — on Broadway. When you breast the human tide of Broadway you feel that you're living."

Then we talked, in general terms, of the great metropolis that lay at our feet and all about us, babbling, roaring, growling, with its sky-piled riches and its misery that grovels and loves the dirt and the dark. But not for an instant did I forget Mrs. Randolph and my strange position, nor cease to torment myself as to the outcome of the singular adventure into which I had been plunged.

When we had returned from the library, and I was trying in my still hesitant mood to play a game of cribbage which Mrs. Randolph fairly forced me into, while Benson and his fiancée had their heads together in another corner of

Digitized by Google

the drawing room, making a pretence of poring over a book, but talking of me, as I knew, Mrs. Randolph, whose playing had been as bad as my own (which is saying it could hardly have been worse) looked up and fixed her azure eyes on me.

"Julian," she said, bending forward and speaking softly, "you know that I love you, and am wild with delight, but — but it was cruel, unless —"

"Unless what?" I asked hoarsely, tumbling down out of my Heaven like Icarus from his.

"Unless you were — were not just right in your mind, you know."

"Deucedly so!" I stammered.

"When you went away before, you did leave word, you know, which we didn't get for a week, however. But that was excusable, because of the circumstances."

What under the heavens was she talking about?

"You had to go suddenly, because the steamer was ready; but you gave John a telegram to send, and it wasn't his fault that he was struck by a trolley car and lay for a week in a hospital unconscious. But you did cable from the other side, and you wrote."

"Yes," I said, non-committally.

Digitized by Google

I couldn't think of anything else to say. My heart was beating up into my throat. Can a man deceive the woman he loves? I was sure I already loved her, and loved her wildly.

"I've feared your mind wasn't just right since you received that dreadful fall on the polo field."

She searched my face with her shining eyes.

"That's it!" I said, grasping at the straw. "That must be the trouble."

"And you must have fallen and injured yourself there in Camden."

"Exactly; that explains it!" I said.

"You can't remember things?"

"No, I can't remember any of the things you are telling me."

Feeling that I was a scoundrel and hypocrite, I wondered what she would think of me if she could look into my heart; what she must ultimately think of me? For this could not go on forever. If she could have so looked, she would have seen my base deception, but she would have seen, also, my great love. And I have been told by those who profess to know that to a woman strong and genuine love will excuse many things. She would have seen not only that I loved her, but that her presence merely had suddenly become as necessary to me as the air I breathed. And that because of it, and

Digitized by Google

the mental confusion into which my determination to win her had hurled me, I was groping my way, and did not know whether to play the part of an honest man or a dissembler.

"You recall the things that happened while you were gone?" she asked, tremulously.

I began to wish heartily that I could run away; I could have foregone even the delight of her presence for a little while rather than be forced to lie to her so baldly.

"No," I answered; and I tried to deceive myself into thinking that in some circuitous manner I was telling the truth.

"You have no memory of it?"

There was a sharp, rising inflection, though her voice was kept low so that those whisperers in the corner could not hear.

"None whatever," was my conscienceless reply.

I saw it was necessary to say this, if I was to go on playing my part; and I saw, too, that further admissions of like intent would be needful before I got very far.

"And the worst of it is," I continued desperately, under this spur, "I seem to have forgotten the past wholly. I had even forgotten you! And for the life of me, I don't recall anything about that young fellow over there, who

Digitized by Google

seems to know me, and whom you call Jack Benson."

The thing was incredible to her, on any other theory than that I had lost my mind temporarily and was now recovering it slowly. And that added a touch of pity to the look of sorrowing love in her eyes. It paled also the clear damask of her cheeks.

"Try to think!" she urged.

For an instant I did not know what to say; then I plunged on, desperately.

"Was I — ever in this condition before?" I queried.

"No."

"I hoped I had been," I said, stammering, "for that would account for it."

"I have telegraphed to Doctor Thompson. Unfortunately, he is out of town. But he will return to-morrow, and then he will come straight here. He is a safe man; keeps his tongue still about the affairs of other people, and is the finest specialist in the city."

The thought of an interview with this keen-eyed specialist frightened me.

"I have denied it twice already," I said. "What if I should say again that I am not your husband?"

She tried to laugh merrily.

Digitized by Google

"As if a man could so declare to his wife!"

"But I doubt it myself," I urged. "Even now I doubt it."

"Julian," she said, earnestly, "I have been studying mental diseases. I took it up through some charity work which made me acquainted with Doctor Thompson. And I have continued it, for no other reason than to occupy my mind somewhat, and because the subject fascinated me."

(A strange subject to fascinate so beautiful, so calm-eyed a woman!)

"So, if you should tell me, and persist in saying it, that you are not my husband, I should simply know that you are not mentally right. It is a phase of certain mental troubles, this denial of identity. But if you don't deny it I shall feel better, for then I shall know that *you* are better."

"Then I won't deny it," I answered, striving for gayety.

It seemed that I was to have an excuse for my lying. Every liar who ever lived has sought a valid excuse for his falsehoods, even Ananias. I tried to smile. But, Heavens, where was this to end? I was getting deeper in every minute.

Yet there was one soothing thought not absent for a moment. Whatever came of this extraordinary adventure, my chances of win-

Digitized by Google

ning this woman for my wife were much better than if I had never met her at all; with which you will of course agree.

As I sat there listening to her voice, drinking from the wells of her clear blue eyes, noting the perfect contour of the now too pallid face, mentally lashing myself at the same time for a scoundrel, I rooted more firmly my determination that out of this, through this, or in spite of it, I would yet win this woman for my wife. She should become to me even what she now believed herself to be. How this was to be accomplished I did not know and could not guess, but that did not shake my determination.

When Jack Benson and Miss Hansborough went out of the room presently, evidently to leave us alone together, Mrs. Randolph drew her chair against mine.

"Julian," she said, with a catching of her breath, "whatever others thought, I cherished the hope from the first that you were not dead, even though — But we will not bring back that horrible dream!"

Then she was crying softly on my shoulder. The overpowering feeling of my baseness shook me, as her head rested thus. It crowded down and killed my longing to put my arms round her and comfort her, or make the pretence.

Digitized by Google

"The whole thing is too bad!" was all I could say.

"Oh, I am so glad — glad!" she cried.

I patted her hair inanely.

"Don't cry," I urged.

"You must have thought me heartless, the way I acted when I saw you? I wanted to scream and jump out of the carriage. I don't know how I restrained myself. But I was afraid, Julian —"

"Yes?" I said, while the blood sang hot in my head, and I cursed myself, with mental gnashings of my teeth.

"I didn't know how you would receive it," she explained, "and that's why we laughed so, and conducted ourselves like silly schoolgirls. When you had remained away so long I was afraid, when I saw you, of mental trouble, and that you might go, and we couldn't stop you. The whole thing has been too strange for words; and —"

"Entirely too strange for words!"

"But I knew you would come back to me some time, if you were living, Julian. For you did love me. You told me so more than once."

Then she cried out again, weeping on my shoulder:

"Oh, Julian, I am so glad — glad!"

Digitized by Google

The breaking point had come for me; I could not stand it longer.

"I feel strangely weak and bewildered," I said, brushing her hair with my lips; "and if — if you are willing, I should like to go up to my rooms for a little while until —"

I stammered, and broke down.

"Yes, yes!" she said, starting up.

She looked at me, her face white with anxious fears, ready to yield any point without opposition.

"It is nothing," I urged; "it will pass off directly. But —"

Remorse gripped me. I could not go on.

"Shall I send a servant with you?" she asked, her lips tremulous.

"No, no!" I ejaculated.

"Or your valet? Jerome can be called at once. Let me send Jerome."

"No," I said, "no one; nothing of the kind!"

I put aside her clinging hands.

"I'll see you again in a little while," I promised, weakly.

Then I fled, basely, cowardly, fearfully, climbing the broad stairs with trembling and hurried feet to the rooms I had been told were my own. I wanted to rush out into the street, but at the moment lacked the necessary courage

Digitized by Google

of self-denial, and was still too hesitating. And I doubted if that would be proper treatment of Mrs. Randolph. I knew I must see her again. Thought of excluding myself from her was already impossible.

As I dropped weakly into a chair I became conscious that a heavy perspiration had broken out all over my body. As soon as I had strength I looked again at my reflection in the pier glass, wondering how my inconsiderate flight would be viewed by Mrs. Randolph — my wife. My God, my wife!

I sank into the chair again, quite unnerved, and passed a trembling hand over my smoothly-shaven face; I looked at the clothing I was wearing — his, her husband's! My misery and self-denunciation racked me until I groaned. The thing I had entered into with all the abandon of a comic opera character had resolved itself into this!

The comic opera villain extricates himself easily from the direst situations, to the great amusement of the spectators; or fails ingloriously, equally to the amusement of the spectators. But what was I to do? This was not comic opera.

I began to walk the room, furiously, feverishly. Once I stopped before the glass, and

Digitized by Google

was sensible of my ridiculous comic opera attitude — hands thrust deep into my pockets, shoulders drawn together, head down in collar like a tortoise trying to retreat into its own shell, face ghastly white, with hectic flushes, as if I were indeed a stage villain with paint and powder touches applied, ready to stand forth in the glare of the lime-light and "still pursue her."

Seeing my ridiculous pose I dropped into the chair again, to think over the situation as calmly as I could. And I demanded of myself with much vehemence why I did not at once leave the house — in an honorable way, if I had any honor left, or fly dishonorably, if I utterly lacked manliness.

Digitized by Google

V

BACK FROM THE DEAD

THOSE twins, Uncertainty and Hesitation, born in a flame of sudden love and sudden longing, had unnerved me and made me less than a man. When I thought of what Mrs. Randolph had already become to me I cowered before the fear of her scorn and hate. Her arms had been round my neck — I seemed still to feel their warm pressure; and her kisses still burned hot on my face. Could I renounce her and go my lonely way? Could I so much as run the risk of losing her?

I knew now that the light of her eyes, changeable as the sky, deep, unfathomable, haunting as the sea, had lured me from the first, with a strength stronger than the mere spirit of adventure. The romance, the novelty, the insistence whose imperious certainty melted into tears, the questioning mystery which stirred the inquisitive instinct — all had been there; but the real lure lay in those azure eyes, in the sweet brightness and earnestness of her face, in the tremulous music of her voice.

Digitized by Google

The joys we have not known we do not consciously miss. If Helen's beauty had never ravished the sight of Paris he would have turned to some other charmer, or gone his way unmoved by fascinations feminine, and still would have enjoyed life. But after he had seen her! I had seen my Helen.

How does one know when he has met Her? How does the Princess know the disguised Prince when he walks out of the scented wood of the fairy tale, the sunlight on his yellow hair? She knows him, even though he wears hodden gray and performs the tasks of a menial. And every little bird nest-building in the branches, or brooding warm blue eggs in which life is stirring, knows that he is the Prince, and rejoices. In the same way I knew. Her face had haunted my dreams; and Her voice had long sounded in my ears, even as the voice of the ocean murmurs forever in the pink ear of the sea-shell wherever that shell may be.

You have been in love. Yet perhaps you never loved as already I loved Her. For the love that comes as the lightning's flash may be even stronger than the love that grows through a season and matures slowly until it exhales its full fragrance like a rose. Love is the parent of Joy. Yet it was not Joy I felt, but Fear—

Digitized by Google

Fear clutched me, lest having found Her I should by some stumble lose Her.

Sent by Mrs. Randolph, Jerome came to me soon, pushing his white, placid, English face into the room with cautious sympathy.

"Is there something I can do for you, sir?" he said, respectfully.

He did not look at me directly, but glanced about furtively, and picked from the floor the silk-lined manicure case I had knocked down, restoring it with a quiet air to its place.

"Nothing, I believe, Jerome," I answered, mastering my emotions and my voice as well as I could. "I shall go to bed soon, and I shall not need your help in retiring."

He still glanced about the rooms, and picked an imaginary thread of cloth from a chair seat in lieu of something else with which to occupy his hands.

"Yes, sir," he said, helplessly; and then he retreated, as silent-footed as when he came.

As soon as he was gone my tempestuous unrest set me to walking again. I knew that Mrs. Randolph was awaiting my return to her, but I could not go. I hoped she would credit my action to the eccentricity which I believed had been part and parcel of the make-up of Julian Randolph. Randolph's actions were, it seemed,

Digitized by Google

likely to belong to the inscrutable domains of Topsy-Turvy Land, where Guesswork sits enthroned on a column of big question marks and holds out to all who approach him the symbol of the sphinx on the end of his sceptre. I was glad to think this was so.

I was horrified, as I looked into the pier glass, for my face was so white it was corpse-like. I was like some Flagellant, lashing himself with cactus thongs while clinging to the sin that caused the self-scourging. I spat scorn at that white face in the mirror and hated myself sincerely.

At intervals I had an accession of courage, and then I was on the point of returning to Mrs. Randolph and declaring to her again with passionate earnestness the whole truth, even though it turned me away from her forever. But this courage was never strong enough to push me through the door and down the broad stairs into her presence.

Not having determined to leave the house, by and by I removed my shoes, so that in my restless walking I might disturb no one—might not disturb Her, nor let her know of my restlessness. I even began to hope she would think I had retired and fallen asleep; and as the time passed I tried to think that she had given over waiting for me.

Digitized by Google

But I was undeceived. A soft rap sounded on my door and a low voice called:

"Julian!"

It was Mrs. Randolph.

"Yes?" I answered, and my voice trembled.

"I have been anxious about you. You are quite well, are you?"

"Thank you for inquiring," I answered. "Yes, I am quite well."

She stood a moment in hesitation, and then I heard her turn to go away.

"Good night!" she called.

"Good night!" I cried. "And God bless you!"

I heard her retreat softly, while I sat staring at the door as if I would pierce its wooden barrier with my eyes.

"You scoundrel!" I whispered, facing my pallid reflection in the pier glass when she was gone. "You double-dyed villain! You mere image and outward semblance of a man, without a man's soul or honor! You are a coward!"

Yet cowardice and hesitation still held me. I knew I could not get out of the house without Mrs. Randolph knowing it — I was not sure that I really wanted to get out—and the hours slipped away.

Digitized by Google

Twice I stole forth into the long hall, shoes in hand. But I fancied I saw a servant watching me, and I went no farther. If I could have gained the street then unobserved, I believe I should have fled, to lose myself somewhere, never to return. Yet in the shock of seeing the servant I was glad — glad I had been seen and stopped.

Going at times to the window, I looked out on the gleaming lights of the city, when the house was quiet, lights that, on the cross streets, ran on in twin lines of brilliant flashes. And the roar of the city came to me — that interminable roar. Nearer were the pattering of hoofs and the subdued roll of rubber-tired vehicles; and farther away the city's wild beast grumble, as if the very paving blocks knew they were being hammered for bread and blood. And so I continued to walk the floor — continued to hesitate and delay, wearing out the night and myself.

This wild-beast grumble became less as the night advanced. But the lights continued to flash, until Day came, and looked in on a pallid man staring at the pallid sky. But in the breaking dawn there was one brief period of ineffable beauty, when the old moon hung low, just over the house-tops, with pale-flame clouds

Digitized by Google

cradling it, and the sky above blushing into delicate shell pink. Even my troubled mind was forced to note the beauty of that scene.

In my studies of the situation, in my backing and filling, there came to me now and then the thought, almost the conviction, that I was not so much to blame — was not so much the deceiver as the deceived. At such times I still wondered with vague apprehensions if it could be possible that Mrs. Randolph was making sport of me. That involved the further thought, disturbing to my vanity, that Miss Hansborough and Jack Benson, and even the English valet, were all using me as the butt of a joke. Perhaps in the morning I should be kicked from the house in disgrace! Well, I knew it would serve me right. I deserved that, and far more.

With the gray dawn breaking, I slipped down to the street door. I wore my shoes this time, and almost meant to leave the house. Though servants were stirring, I was sure I could get out, and be far enough away before Mrs. Randolph's rising hour.

I had all the shrinking of a timid burglar as I stole thus through the halls and down the stairway, and when I beheld a servant by the door I wanted to turn about in flight. I saw, however, that if I really wished to get out of the

Digitized by Google

house now was the time. As I approached this servant he opened the street door, and when he drew back I saw that he had a morning paper. A staring head-line caught my eye and changed my purpose instantly.

"I will take the paper," I said, as boldly as I could.

He relinquished it to me, reluctantly I thought, and the next moment I was running through the hall and climbing the stairs, the paper clutched tightly.

On the upper landing I glanced at it again; then continued on into my rooms in most undignified haste. With shaking fingers I closed and locked the door, and sinking breathlessly into a chair I stared at those head-lines; then began to read with feverish intentness what was beneath them.

BACK FROM THE DEAD

THE RETURN OF JULIAN RANDOLPH

The Millionaire Clubman Again in the Bosom of his Family

Three columns wide and a fourth of a column in length, those head-lines, with others, fairly hurled themselves at me. They told the story;

Digitized by Google

yet more than two columns of astounding and sensational comment followed.

As I read I sat dumbfounded. This put a new face on the matter. I had not thought of the ubiquitous newspaper reporter with his insatiable thirst for sensation. Some one had witnessed my meeting with Mrs. Randolph and her sister, and some gossipy house servant had talked. And here it was, spread to the light of day. Added to the shock was the pity I felt for Mrs. Randolph. This was cruel.

The valet came before I had decided my course of action. I tucked the offending newspaper out of sight, and admitted him.

"You are up early, sir," he said.

The expression of his face was block-like. It was hard for me to believe that this man possessed human emotions.

"I did not sleep well," I explained.

That I had not slept at all he must have known, for I still had on the clothing worn the previous evening.

"Sorry, sir," was his comment. "Something I can do for you, sir?"

He pulled open a drawer and began to take the razor from its case of satin and silver. I stayed him with a gesture.

"I don't think I will be shaved this morning."

Digitized by Google

He put the razor away and closed the drawer.

"Jerome," I said, "just lay out the clothing I'm to wear to-day, and then you may be excused."

He began to obey, silently. He was a wise servant and showed nothing of the surprise he probably felt. I wanted to be rid of him, to be alone, that I might re-read that newspaper report without having my face read at the same time, and give myself further thought on this unique and puzzling situation. I felt that it was needful now for me to lay my course as carefully as a sea captain who is navigating a dangerous sea in a fog. Only this was wholly an unchartered sea to me. Steer as carefully as I might, I was likely to go on the rocks at any time.

Yet curiosity got the better of me.

"Jerome," I said, as he turned to go, "I suppose my disappearance — my death as it was thought to be — created wide comment at the time — in all the papers?"

"Very true, sir," he answered, turning to look at me.

"No reporters have tried to interview you, or the other servants, since my — my return?"

For the first time his face showed color and animation — or it may have been indignation.

Digitized by Google

"They have even tried to sneak into the house, sir, if a door was left open a moment! A half-dozen are outside now."

In imagination I saw them then, an army of them, trying to storm the steps from the avenue.

"Is Mrs. Randolph aware of this?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, sir; she gave orders that none was to be admitted, and that none of the servants was to talk. Twice I have myself been offered bribes to tell what I knew. And they have tried many times — very many times — to see you and Mrs. Randolph."

"Thank you; that is all, Jerome," I said weakly, dismissing him.

I was indeed beleaguered, and had not known it. All knowledge of it had been kept from me carefully by Mrs. Randolph. She had held the reportorial mob at bay alone. But out there the yellow flags of the sensational press were flying, and mustered under them were men who never acknowledged defeat. I did not doubt that sooner or later they would accomplish their purpose and reach me even over the barriers erected by Mrs. Randolph's devotion to the man she believed to be her husband.

As I changed my clothing I tried to think to some satisfactory conclusion, and realized that even had I fled in the night from the house I

Digitized by Google

should have been pursued by the reporters. I could hardly have escaped their vigilant espionage. The sensation in which they were revelling would have yellowed to the deepest saffron. Their papers would have become mere screaming head-lines; and if I had sought to hide, or fly, the reportorial hounds would have been in full cry, voicing their clamor to the ear of the startled night. I was glad now I had not tried to leave the house.

But what was I to do? They would find me out; they would expose me!

Digitized by Google

VI

WHEN THE FATES WERE CRAZY

WHILE I still considered, striving to reach some satisfactory decision, there was a gentle tap on the door. When I opened it I beheld Mrs. Randolph.

Her attire was brighter than it had been before. I cannot name a single detail of that change, but it was as if a rather sober, dark-hued bird had put gold and silver and color of flame and rainbow on its wings, or as when a graceful, burgeoning tree crowns itself with leaves and flowers under the influence of the warm life of spring stirring in its heart. Her beauty enthralled me. Yet in it there was pathos, and the traces of grief and tears mingled with joy.

"May I come in?" she said, with attempted brightness.

"Yes, certainly," I answered; "delighted to see you! I have been thinking of you."

"Jerome hasn't been to attend on you?"

She looked at me anxiously as she came in, and I thought she smiled a little wearily, though

Digitized by Google

she was trying to seem cheerful, and even happy.

"I was anxious about you, through the night. You fairly fled from me, you know. I'm afraid you didn't sleep well, for we heard you walking about. Jack went away shortly after you started to your rooms, and I spent the night with Margaret. You won't mind if I confess that I once tiptoed to your door here? — I was so anxious!"

That charm indefinably feminine, which makes strong men fall prostrate at the feet of women, surrounded her like an atmosphere, or the perfume of flowers. Sometimes women who are not beautiful have it. She possessed it, and was beautiful.

The desire to take her in my arms I repressed with difficulty; I felt that she would not object, would even be glad, and would have nestled her bright head against my breast in happiness. She was longing for the clasp of my arms (the arms of the man she supposed to be her husband) even as I was longing to draw her to me in a close embrace and tell her how I loved her, and I knew it. Yet I took that wild desire by the throat and strangled it as if it were a wolf.

As I sank into a chair, unnerved and un-

Digitized by Google

manned, she drew up another, and sat down by me, her hand on my arm.

"Julian,"—her low voice trembled,—"don't think, dear, that I want to say anything to trouble you!"

"Oh, I know you do not!" I answered. "I must seem like a dog to you — the veriest cur."

She gasped as with pain, and the clutch of her hand tightened.

"Not at all," she insisted gently. "I know that — that you are not — not very well. It was for that reason I sent for our old physician. You recall when I became acquainted with him in that charity work, don't you? And you liked him."

A clammy sweat came out on my forehead.

"He was away yesterday, you remember I told you. You will receive him?"

"If I must," I said, desperately.

I glanced round, like a hunted rat searching for a hole.

"I have given orders that no one is to disturb you," she went on, calmly, "and that no one is to be admitted. You are nervous — very nervous. Doctor Thompson will be able to give you something that will help you."

I looked at her again, that flood of passionate longing surging within me like a rising tide.

Digitized by Google

Simple faith lighted her eyes; and here was I again playing the hypocrite in the most monumental fashion.

"We haven't talked over the matter thoroughly," I said.

I was mean enough to wish to know more of Julian Randolph and his past, that I might have better footing for my uncertain steps. Though I had not decided to continue my despicable rôle, I was still unable to decide not to continue it, and had a feeling that I might be driven on in my present course; for I could not think of leaving this woman, now that I knew her, even though I might loathe myself for remaining. I felt that to leave her was to lose her. In addition, if I was to meet this doctor, it was desirable for me to learn all I could, that I might do it successfully. I should be a good actor indeed, and should need all possible self-possession and knowledge, if I was to deceive him.

"Julian, dear," she was saying, even as these thoughts went through my harassed mind, "have you quite forgotten *all* the circumstances of your going away?"

I hesitated. Should I lie to her?

"If the things you tell me are true, I have forgotten everything," I replied brazenly.

Digitized by Google

"Poor boy!" she said, and stroked my arm.

"I had a talk with Jerome, and he told me something," I said, wondering how I was to justify my present attitude and square myself eventually. "This doctor knows me well, you say?"

"Thoroughly."

"Suppose he declares that —?" I stopped, hesitating.

"Yes?"

"Suppose he declares that there is no loss of memory?"

"There is no danger of that, dear."

I made another effort to be honest with myself and her.

"But I have told you," I urged, "that I was astounded when you claimed me as your husband. My memory of events is not the same as yours. I do not recall this house, nor the places of which Jerome told me, nor even Jerome himself. I must be honest with you; I am not the man you think I am — I am not your husband!"

Her arms were round my neck instantly and she was sobbing. I tried to release myself, but her arms clung tight as tendrils.

"No — no!" she cried, sobbing more violently. "Now, be a good boy, Julian! I know,

Digitized by Google

of course, that you would not have remained away from me if you had been just yourself. So this does not disturb me." (My God — did not disturb her; and she was weeping like Niobe!) "Doctor Thompson will be able to help you. I have the utmost faith in him."

I saw I could not leave her at once. And how I dreaded that doctor! How weak I was, too, to let her cling to me in that manner! I cursed my unmanliness.

Before she could say more, or I could think of anything other than my combined happiness and misery, quick steps were heard beyond the door, and then a light knock.

She rose hurriedly and opened the door. A servant stood there.

"Doctor Thompson has arrived," was the announcement.

Mrs. Randolph slipped from the room and ran down the stairs. Then I heard her talking with him in the hall below. She conducted him to my rooms, but did not enter. Yet I felt that she was near.

I eyed him closely as he came in. He was a gray-bearded, gray-eyed man, his hair close-cropped, his beard of the Vandyke cut, his clothing gray and loose-fitting, and he held in his left hand the gray glove he had removed

Digitized by Google

when he met her. He extended the ungloved hand to me as I rose, and the keen eyes searched my face, while I flushed with embarrassment. There was a piercing quality in those eyes which made me think of probes. I was sure he would penetrate my mask at once. Hence his greeting puzzled me; for I had expected him to retreat, or perhaps stand firm and denounce me. He did neither.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Randolph," he said, in the friendliest manner, sinking into a chair near the one I had dropped back into, while he still probed me with those keen eyes which needed no aid of glasses.

Then he began to talk, laughing and smiling, though I still felt that he was searching me through and through. I had a sort of angry irritation, and was resentful, and I held myself in reserve, determined not to trip myself up. Having lost the will to confess my imposture, I began to pit my intellect and keenness against his professional knowledge and acumen. And a certain feeling of pride came to aid me. It seemed to me it would be a rare triumph if I could deceive this sharp-eyed physician. But apparently he was already deceived. Mrs. Randolph had deceived him, so thoroughly was she deceived herself.

Digitized by Google

I learned that he had driven down in his phaeton, instead of coming in an automobile or public conveyance, for he began to talk of his horse, with all the pride of a professional jockey. It was a wonderful horse; young, strong, beautiful as one of the steeds of Achilles, and he gloried in his ability to manage it in the crowded city streets. I quite forgot myself in his enthusiasm over that horse.

"He will probably injure you some day," I suggested.

He blew out his thin cheeks, setting the stiff gray beard on edge, while his keen eyes snapped with delight.

"Not the least danger in the world!"

He made the assertion in the confident tone of a man who knows his power.

Having exhausted the merits of that marvellous horse, and having made me forget myself, he asked suddenly:

"What are your plans now?"

My heart jumped and my cheeks flamed, while I tried hard to adjust quickly the steel armor of my defence.

"I have none," I answered weakly.

He took my hand and pressed his long forefinger on my pulse, while my heart was swinging like a trip-hammer.

Digitized by Google

"You will be wise to take a little sea trip," he advised. "Run up to Newport or Boston, or even farther. The noise of the city doesn't trouble you?"

"Not in the least," was my truthful answer.

"A little sea trip, after a few days, will be a good thing; and your wife will enjoy it."

A sudden scorn of him must have flashed in my eyes. Yet he laughed quietly, kept his finger on my pulse, and looked again at the dial of his little, open-face watch. His manner, and the ticking of the watch, with the knowledge that my pulse was jumping feverishly, annoyed me.

He released my hand and put the watch back into his pocket.

"I will write a prescription and give it to Mrs. Randolph. And quite unprofessionally, I wish to say that I'm very glad to know that you are doing so well. Perhaps in a day or two you will like to drop round to my office?"

He took out his professional card undemonstratively and laid it on the table. And he wrung my hand again, as he got ready to go.

I heard him speak to Mrs. Randolph in the lower hall, and heard them talking in low tones as they walked away together.

I dropped back into my chair and wanted to

Digitized by Google

laugh, and condemned myself for this feeling of levity. Yet why should I not laugh? I had been given to understand that this man stood at the head of his profession! And he was, or seemed to be, deceived as completely as Mrs. Randolph herself. Had comedy ever such a situation? The Fates had gone crazy; and the Oracles were dumb, or drunk.

Digitized by Google

VII

IN THE FOOL'S PARADISE

WE breakfasted in the bright, well-lighted dining room, where the clatter of hoofs and the roll of wheels reached us but faintly. By day the dining room had lost something of the splendor lent by soft, lily-bulbed lights. It was a pleasant room, and quiet. Carnations and blush roses sent forth their fragrance; and Mrs. Randolph had placed a carnation in her hair. But not a flower of them all could match in loveliness the woman who called me her husband.

Apparently determined to be bright and charming, or because she really could not be otherwise, she had put aside the tears that had distressed me, and joyous welcome tripped from her tongue.

Miss Hansborough, in white, was almost as charming, and more girlish and piquant. No remote reference was made by either to the thing that I knew was uppermost in the heart of each. It was as if I belonged there, and had always been there. The situation was one of

Digitized by Google

such ease that when we began to talk it was as good comrades and friends, while the silent servants came and went, and the variable "clock-clock" of hoofs reached us from apparently far away.

All the while I pondered my singular position and wondered as to its outcome. And yielding to the weakness that had conquered me I tried to give myself up to the enjoyment of what I was sure was but a Fool's Paradise. But even a short hour of this was worth much. I was beginning to ask myself, too, why I should not continue to dwell in Eden, since the Angel of the Flaming Sword had fallen asleep, and, no longer guarding the entrance, had let me in.

Here was I, who yesterday was but a friendless stranger trying to be gay in gay Babylon, occupying now this home of wealth and refinement as its recognized head, dowered not only with the friendship, but with the love — aye, the worship! — of its charming mistress. Had Romance ever taken a more erratic gait! Not only were the Fates crazy and the Oracles drunk, but Fortunatus and Aladdin lived again and were turning the world upside down for me.

Wealth hitherto unknown would be mine; and this woman, this angel of the sky-bright eyes and warm, brown hair, would be mine,

Digitized by Google

also, if I yielded to the temptation that beset me. Possible wealth had no seductive power compared with that. With her I could abide happy anywhere.

> A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
> A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread — and Thou
> Beside me singing in the Wilderness —
> Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

Thus temptation, with more than the strength of Samson, tugged at the Gaza gates of my soul, threatening to carry them away.

After a time Miss Hansborough began to talk again of the Harvard-Yale game.

"It's going to be a great game, Jack says," she declared with fine enthusiasm. "I wouldn't miss it for anything."

She picked out the reddest of the roses — three of them — and pinned one on my coat, another on Mrs. Randolph's dress, and adorned herself with the third.

"Rah, rah, rah, — Harvard!"

She laughed merrily, and for the moment I was really quite happy and enthusiastic.

"When is this great game to be?" I asked.

"The twenty-second of this month — June; June, the Month of Roses! I shall get a bunch

Digitized by Google

of the biggest and reddest roses I can find to wear, and we'll simply fill the auto with them, and with the Harvard colors."

"And that isn't so very far away, either," said Mrs. Randolph. "If you're willing, Julian" (she fixed her eyes on me), "we'll go to Newport in the *Idler* for a few days, and then we can take the train for Boston, and send the yacht round with the captain and crew."

If *I* were willing? Heavens!

"And we'll have just the jolliest time," said Miss Hansborough, admiring the rose she had pinned on her bosom. "Oh, I do hope Harvard will win!"

"The doctor says," began Mrs. Randolph; then hesitated, seeming to regret that she had said anything.

"What does he say?" I asked.

"He thought a little sea trip and change would help you."

"Good!" I cried, in pretended high spirits. "We'll sail the world over. I like that name — the *Idler*. It hints of basking seas, and coral islands, and naked brown men, and all the things I've read about and never expected to see. I admire Doctor Thompson. When he runs for mayor of New York I shall be the first to vote for him."

Digitized by Google

"Doctor Thompson is a wonderful man," said Mrs. Randolph.

"He is!" I agreed, with pretended levity, yet with covert meaning. "When he called to see me he felt my pulse and talked about his horse. We need such a man for President of these United States. How he would see through all the little schemes of the mere politicians!"

Though I was laughing as I ended I saw that Mrs. Randolph was not pleased. She admired that great man, Doctor Thompson, and believed in him thoroughly; and I did not doubt that she wrote generous checks for him, in a fair and beautiful feminine hand. She would have done as well, I felt, if she had thrown her money into the East River.

We arose from the table, still talking, and Miss Hansborough began to select some more of the reddest of the roses.

I strolled uneasily into the library, where the deep windows overlooked the avenue. Mrs. Randolph followed me, and came and stood with me by the window, looking through the curtains into the street. In a few moments a servant entered with cigars and placed them, with matches, by the little brass ash-tray on the table near the window.

As the servant retreated, Mrs. Randolph

Digitized by Google

drew up one of the chairs. I reached for another, which I placed beside it. She smiled contentedly. And like a flash it came to me that Julian Randolph had been accustomed to sit by this window and smoke his after-breakfast cigar, and that often his wife sat with him. My false gayety and the smile I had summoned passed away together. However, I took one of the cigars and lighted it, and sank into my chair. Again my heart was hammering up into my throat.

"Julian," she said, pathetically, yet brightly, laying her hand on the arm of my chair and looking at me with such earnestness that my gaze wavered, "it is just Heaven to have you home again."

Digitized by Google

VIII

INTRODUCES THE VILLAIN

A THING happened that morning, while I still lingered and debated my course of action, which determined me to continue my rôle. This determination may have been forced by my desire, but I refuse to think so. I want to give myself credit for one small altruistic sentiment.

Courtney Lane, Mrs. Randolph's business manager, had been summoned to the house, and came hurriedly. Standing well back in the library I first caught sight of him framed in one of the deep windows as in a draped picture, as he stepped from his red automobile to the curb. All I saw then was that he was young and alert. My imagination was playing tricks with me I suppose, as it had done frequently in the past few hours, but I thought he sniffed the air uneasily as he came up the steps, while the automobile which had brought him rolled away.

I heard him and Mrs. Randolph approaching the library, after a long talk, and as I chanced at the moment to be standing close by

Digitized by Google

the door, this scrap of their low-toned conversation floated to me:

He:

"It's a mistake, and I seriously disapprove of it."

She:

"Yet if he isn't allowed to do this it will advertise the fact to the world, which is the thing I wish to avoid."

I drew heavily at my cigar and moved away from the door, wondering how I was to see this thing through and what the nature of the coming interview was to be.

Then they came into the room, she smiling and walking a little in advance of him. As I rose from the chair into which I had retreated, and for the first time saw his face clearly, I experienced a mental shock; for I had met and been introduced to this man but the week before, in Philadelphia, under circumstances which it was impossible he could forget.

As his eyes fell on me he stopped short, and stood staring, like a gorgon head on a waterspout. Mrs. Randolph was introducing us, incuriously unobservant.

"Mr. Lane, let me make you acquainted with my husband; Mr. Randolph, Mr. Lane."

He had alert eyes of steely blue, and good

Digitized by Google

teeth as I saw when his lips opened in a strange, incredulous smile. Whatever his thoughts he suppressed them, but I knew we were enemies from that moment.

"Glad to meet you," I said, as composedly as possible.

Lane's smile deepened with meaning.

"Pardon me for the suggestion," he said as he seated himself; "but I had the strange experience of meeting your counterpart, in Philadelphia, the other night. It was at a students' gathering, and the fellow was an under-professor in the school there, I think."

But I had been given time to steel myself. He looked at me steadily, and I as steadily returned his gaze. He was a man of thirty, of the alert, business type, and I was not surprised to learn later that he dabbled in law, haunted the stock exchange, and was Mrs. Randolph's financial adviser. His only facial adornment was a thin, dark moustache.

"I always thought that after Nature fashioned me she broke the mould," I said, as lightly as I could. "There can't be another man in the world like me."

"You were in Philadelphia that night?" he asked, with restrained eagerness.

"And at that student gathering," I admitted.

Digitized by Google

"As an instructor there, through a whim, I had been for some time pouring my borrowed lore into the heads of meek youths who accepted it as the pure gold of knowledge. They only thought that they knew less than I did. Mrs. Randolph could tell you rare stories of my eccentricities, no doubt, if she should choose to do so."

I spoke lightly, and hoped to bewilder him. Mrs. Randolph's eyes opened a trifle and the color rose in her cheeks. Lane's steely eyes narrowed and glinted.

"I have sent for Mr. Lane, that we might talk over some matters of business," she said, evasively.

"Very true," Lane assented.

He passed his hand over his thin moustache, to hide a sceptical smile I thought.

"There has been a good deal of legal business, you understand," Mrs. Randolph continued, "and Mr. Lane attended to it for me. I had myself appointed administratrix, but I was so inexperienced that I left the details to him. He has the principal check books and the lists of the stocks and securities. I gave him a power of attorney to act in my place in everything, and —"

"To sign your bank checks?" I said sharply, and looked at him.

"I have the stubs showing the later checks,"

Digitized by Google

he explained, "and a memorandum book here containing a record of the recent purchases of stocks. The others can be produced. I did not just understand —"

He hesitated.

I understood, I thought. With a full power of attorney, he was empowered to stand in her stead, and that opened the way to all sorts of questionable devices, unless he was a man of the strictest integrity. I marvelled at Mrs. Randolph's business stupidity. And when I saw her look at him with what seemed to me more than mere confidence I felt a swift fire of jealousy. Already I hated Courtney Lane. Those keen eyes, the rather sharp, firm chin, the reposeful thin-lipped mouth, the broad daring forehead, indicated a man who might be a keen and resourceful Captain of Industry, an adroit diplomat, a great gambler, or a plunger playing the races and taking dangerous flyers in Wall Street. Withal he was a man to deceive an inexperienced woman into thinking him a gentleman of stainless honor.

Instead of completing his sentence, he produced a small memorandum book and some stubs of bank check books.

"Everything recently done you will find a note of here, Mr. Randolph."

Digitized by Google

He extended them to me, and emphasized the name.

Mrs. Randolph arose and hovered at my shoulder, explaining, as I looked at these vouchers of his integrity. A hasty examination showed me that checks had been drawn for large sums, and that there had been heavy purchases of what I fancied were questionable stocks, together with some losses.

"Why!" she exclaimed suddenly, in astonished perturbation, "I thought you told me that the Python group would surely advance?"

"I thought so at the time," he answered. "I used my best judgment. If one could foresee the exact movements of the market for even a week he could write his check with nine figures in less than that time."

Yet I noted that he had been suddenly confused. Perhaps he had thought she would not see those figures, written small at the bottom of one of the tiny pages.

"But you will observe that Arizona Consolidated has gone above par," he added quickly, with the apparent purpose of soothing her fears or lulling her suspicions.

"Yes," she admitted, "but I had only a few dozen shares of that. And these other shares — Mr. Lane, I didn't instruct you to buy so many!"

Digitized by Google

Her face had become pale.

"I used my judgment, as you once told me to," he urged blandly. "I also put a good deal of my own money into them; and while they are down now, I'm confident they will catch the upswing soon, and pay handsomely in the long run. You will not regret their purchase, Mrs. Randolph. But if you wish I can sell them. My advice is against it, though."

His manner was again easy and natural. He even had an elegant air, as of a man of leisure, as he sat there, leaning back in his chair.

She took the book and looked over the columns of small figures, pondering and mentally calculating. I studied Lane, trying to fathom the mind behind that smooth face. The conviction that he was tricky, and that in his position as agent and financial adviser he had been trading on Mrs. Randolph's ignorance to his own financial betterment, became a certainty to me, when she said:

"But I didn't instruct you, Mr. Lane, to buy any of *these* shares! There was a heavy loss in them two months ago, and I was assessed."

"For improvements — substantial improvements," he explained. "When those improvements are completed the shares will quickly double in value."

Digitized by Google

She puckered her brows in bewilderment. So convinced was I now of his swindling that I wanted to take him by the throat and hurl him through the window. But had even a doubt of him risen in the mind of Mrs. Randolph? I knew it had not when she looked at him, for the one accusation which her look held concerned merely the wisdom of his financial judgments. His entire honesty she did not question.

She sat down, with the books in her hands. I saw his face harden in anticipation of something. It came, in her next sentence; and I knew it was one of the things they had discussed before coming to me.

"And now about the power of attorney, Mr. Lane? I think it should terminate at once, don't you, since the return of my husband?"

It sent a thrill through me to have her say "my husband," in that way, showing thus the confidence of wifely love. And the culpability of my position again overwhelmed me.

"It can be attended to, if you desire it," he replied with bland courteousness.

"The smooth rascal intends to argue her out of it later," thought I.

"I wish it," she said. "We will revoke the power of attorney, and get this administration matter wound up quietly. We can trust you to

Digitized by Google

do that, Mr. Lane? You will know how to manage it so that it can be kept from the newspapers?"

"Readily enough, I think," he assented. "I will soon adjust these matters to your satisfaction, Mrs. Randolph. To-morrow I shall be busy with a case before the Superior Court. But this shall be attended to, just as you wish it."

"Will it take long?"

"Legal matters are proverbially slow," he remarked quietly. "I will hurry it for you as much as possible. If I can I will talk to the Judge of Probate on the subject of the administratorship early in the morning."

"But the power of attorney?" she persisted. "That surely needs no delay?"

"Oh, as to that," he said, as if he really would be glad to be well rid of it, "it can be done at once."

"As soon as possible, then," she said, with relief. "Draw up a revocation of the power of attorney at once, please."

"Very well," he answered calmly; and he rose to go.

He extended his hand to me.

"Mr. Randolph," he said, with stress of emphasis on the name, "it is a pleasure to

Digitized by Google

know you, as it has long been a pleasure to me to know your charming wife. I shall see you again soon, no doubt. These matters will be attended to satisfactorily at as early a date as possible."

He released my hand and dropped the memorandum and check books into his pocket.

"Your wife's summons was most unexpected, but to-morrow, or at some early date, I shall be pleased to make a full exhibit of all my financial transactions undertaken in her behalf. I am glad to see that you are looking so well, Mr. Randolph."

"I hope we shall become better acquainted," I answered, with covert meaning.

He backed toward the door; and went out of the room, followed by Mrs. Randolph, and again I heard them talking in low tones. Hot indignation and impotent rage consumed me. To compose myself I lighted a cigar, and began to walk about the room, smoking furiously, but stopped, as had become my custom, before that window.

From it I saw him descend to the street, where his automobile, which had been brought round again, was purring gently, like a big family cat; and I saw him leap in, give an order to the chauffeur, and dash away. In that sur-

Digitized by Google

veillance, it seemed to me, I detected the hidden nervousness and fright which he had so well concealed in the library. I shook my fist at him as the automobile swept him out of sight.

"Courtney Lane," I said, but without incautiously voicing the words, "I have seen through your damnable treachery to the woman who is trusting in you, and so sure as there is a God, before I get through with you I will hurl you out of that red automobile into the cell of a prison, where you belong!"

My face was flushed and I was agitated when Mrs. Randolph returned to the room.

"How long have you known Courtney Lane?" I asked abruptly.

"Nearly two years," she answered.

"I don't think I am going to like him," I declared. "I am glad you intend to revoke at once that power of attorney. The sooner you do it the better, in my opinion."

"Why, Julian, he is perfectly honest!" she urged.

"I am not convinced of it," I told her.

"I thought I ought to revoke it at once," she said, "since your return; and that is what I told him, before we came in here to see you. I didn't want to be precipitate, but I couldn't wait."

Digitized by Google

"And he was opposed to it?"

"Only because he — he thought it not wise just now."

"Why not now?" I insisted, almost forgetting my own position in my glowing indignation against Courtney Lane.

"Your strange disappearance, Julian; forgive me for reminding you."

Her face flushed.

"I think I'll show you something," she said, as if to change the subject.

She was gone but a minute, returning with a sheaf of telegrams and letters, together with copies of the morning papers.

"Since you've seen one of the papers," she explained, thus acknowledging that the servant of whom I had taken the morning paper had told her of it.

She took a chair by me and began to display the telegrams and letters. Many of them were addressed to "Mr. Julian Randolph," the others to her, and they were congratulatory. She had opened all of them. The senders had read the morning papers, and then had hurried these messages of good will to Mrs. Randolph and "her husband."

"This is from Sir Philip Cuthbert," she said, taking up a large, square envelope and extract-

Digitized by Google

ing a note in big, boyish handwriting. "We met him in England, you know, and he chances now to be in New York, and is at the Waldorf."

I looked curiously at the upright handwriting and at Sir Philip's sprawling signature.

"And this is from Mr. Wilson Spindrift, the yachtsman. You sailed the *Idler* against his *Genesta* once, off Marblehead, and you defeated him."

I sailed the *Idler!* Ye gods!

"And this," she opened a telegram, "is from Mrs. Beale — Florence Beale, you know — the mousie little woman with catty eyes and reddish hair who tried so hard to break into society at Newport that time. She is still at it, and hurried this to me. She is one of the 'Climbers.' You never liked her, and I didn't. She threw herself at Harold DeKoster, and then threatened to sue him for breach of promise. The idea!" She laughed lightly.

"And here is a telegram from Joseph Stillman, who is really a fine architect, but not at all fashionable. He doesn't try to 'break in' anywhere, with a jimmy or otherwise. We became so well acquainted with him when he designed and built *The Poplars*."

There were scores of them, and she went

Digitized by Google

through them all, while I read and listened in wonder. My position was becoming every moment more difficult. I thought of it as she read and commented; thought of Courtney Lane and the scoundrelism with which my imagination clothed him; thought of plans by which I might thwart him and save Mrs. Randolph from the financial disaster I feared; and considered, too, the possible blows he would deliver in return if I stood my ground and dared to attack him. My head buzzed with it all.

When she had gone through the telegrams and letters she turned to the newspapers, and together we looked them over, while I absorbed from them information concerning Julian Randolph.

"Some of these things are ridiculously preposterous," she declared. "I discharged two of the servants this morning for talking to the reporters. Much of it, you know, is out of whole cloth — there is not a shred of truth in it."

I didn't know, though she assumed that I did. Yet from her criticisms of the news "stories" I gained some knowledge of what to believe in them and what not to believe.

"Isn't this jolly?" she cried suddenly, referring to the joy she found in sitting by me and talking these things over with me.

Digitized by Google

Her blue eyes were bright with happiness.

Then she saw the shadow on my face.

"I know I distress you, Julian!"

"No," I urged, "it is not that."

"You'll be willing to see some of these people soon?" she said, taking up some of the letters and telegrams. She seemed chilled by my apparent coldness. "They will expect it. And I'm sure I shall enjoy it. I've been thinking of a reception. Silly of me, you'll say."

Still I did not answer. How could I meet these people? I knew not one of them — and was glad that I did not. But they had known Julian Randolph. How could I pass their scrutiny? Yet I had passed hers successfully, and if I could deceive her I could deceive anybody. Mixed with these quick reflections was thought of Courtney Lane. She needed some one to protect her against him.

"My dear woman," I said, speaking out this thought, "revoke Mr. Lane's power of attorney at once — without a day's delay."

"And that is how you answer my suggestion?"

"This is more important than a score of such things."

"But you do not object?"

"Oh, no — no! Really, whatever you do will please me."

Digitized by Google

"Now that is like your old self!"

Before I could prevent it, or divined her intention, she kissed me on the cheek.

"Julian," she cried with a sob of joy, "I am *so* happy! I can't tell you how happy I am."

Digitized by Google

IX

THE RECEPTION

FACES lie even more than words. If they were given us to exhibit emotions, as words to express thoughts, they have gone quite as far astray from this original intention. To shirt-waist from fig-leaf is not farther than to the face-masking present from those primal days when men barked uproariously their loves and hates and with facial contortions wrote the history of their changing sentiments. Let us rejoice that this is so. Were it otherwise who could stand complacently before his fellow men?

The ability to make the face say what the mind contradicts enabled me to live through, and even to enjoy to a degree, the hours immediately following my determination to play to the end my Comedy of Lies for the benefit of Mrs. Randolph's finances. In this comedy I foresaw Courtney Lane enacting the rôle of Villain with a big V, and myself the Hero.

Yet I do think my intentions were genuinely heroic, and I insist here on being credited to that extent. For I thought to immolate my

Digitized by Google

love on the altar of service. He who can so resolve, if no more, is, it seems to me, as worthy of praise as that over-lauded individual who in the hot and bloody excitement of battle rushes with bayoneted rifle up to the snarling lips of smoke-wreathed cannon. There are other ways of committing suicide, and the motives may be quite as fine. I knew I could not live if I now lost Mrs. Randolph.

She had flowered forth like a new-made bride, and began to revel in bewildering vanities of dress. Hourly, while I was trying to plan my battle lines and making believe that in strategy I was an Oyama-Togo, she came to me to exhibit some "creation," with a distracting rustling and trailing of skirts, asking my opinion of the pretty things, just as if I were a Parisian man-milliner.

Whatever she wore she was the loveliest woman under the sun, and many times I was tempted into telling her so, when she walked around and before me with such saucy and happy piquancy, begging me with her sapphire eyes to admire her. After each yielding I had to lash myself anew with the cactus thongs. Which gave me a novel view of the mediæval conscience administering self-punishment and then hurrying gayly to sin again.

Digitized by Google

"Julian," she said with sly witchery in one of these delightful moments, "I feel just as if I were a girl again, in the salad days of our courtship. You were too timid for anything, and I just adored your shrinking timidity, and wouldn't have had you otherwise for the world. Now, look at me!" (She shook her finger at me saucily, as if I were a Boston terrier that she was trying to teach tricks!) "Don't you think this dress the most becoming of all?"

"It is," I admitted. "The one you are wearing is always the prettiest of all."

"Where did you learn that flattery? But you always were a flatterer. I think you were born in Ireland, close by the Blarney Stone. I wonder you haven't a brogue. Now, I'll show you what I'm to wear at the reception."

She tripped away, laughing back at me from the doorway, where she made a pretty picture. And then she ran daintily through the connecting room into her own apartments, where her maid awaited her.

When she returned I gasped at her loveliness. She was in evening dress, of pure white, relieved only by a red rose. Her shoulders and arms were matchless, her slender figure willowy with grace, her shining brown hair done in a bewildering coil which my masculine pencil refuses

Digitized by Google

to attempt to describe. I could not restrain my pride in her, and my rapture.

"You are simply divine!" I cried, with the enthusiasm of high emotion.

"Do you like it?"

She turned slowly round and round that I might view her charms from every point.

"Like it? You are adorable."

"Why don't you say the rest?"

"The rest?"

"Use my name, I mean. Why don't you say, 'You are adorable, Kitty?' That is, if you think so."

"I do think so."

"'Kitty,'" she added.

"Kitty Randolph, you are the loveliest, the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

She reddened like a debutante, for she saw that I meant it.

Miss Hansborough rendered Mrs. Randolph valuable assistance in all this. The nut-brown maid had not only "a flashing eye to love," but a simply-practical mind. Her pulse was rhythmically cool. I was sure she played golf with precision and lack of bubbling inefficiency, even before I was told so. Such a woman would be sure to tee her golf ball and drive it with calmness of nerve and clarity of vision.

Digitized by Google

"Sister mine," she would say, speaking through the fish-weir of pins that filled her mouth, "your hair must come down a little; it is entirely too high."

To me at the moment Mrs. Randolph's hair could not have been bettered. But when the change had been made I knew that the nut-brown maid was right.

"Sister mine," she would say again, half closing her brown eyes while standing back to look, "that skirt is a trifle short behind."

It was perfect, I thought; this particular skirt belonging to an outing dress that revealed dainty boots and the trimmest of ankles. But again when the skirt came down I was forced to admire Miss Hansborough's judgment.

But when the nut-brown maid turned to me (Mrs. Randolph was out of the room) and said, "Julian, are you *afraid* of the reporters?" I was too startled to admire her.

"They are likely to be annoying," I stammered.

"Very true," she admitted, "but it strikes me that the way to disarm them is to show them that there is no powder in their pistols."

Mrs. Randolph came in, with the suggested change made in her dress, and Miss Hansborough went no further.

Digitized by Google

That evening, however, when Jerome came to me, I learned why she had made that startling declaration. Jerome was usually as silent of voice as of foot unless I questioned him and set him to talking, when he could become as garrulous as any New England spinster over her tea-cups. I questioned him that evening, and he told me of a reporter's attempt to get to see me and his hint that I was not Julian Randolph.

"The rascal came into the kitchen, sir, in the disguise of a servant girl; and he had got into the long hall that leads to the dining room, when I stopped him."

His white face had flushed to a pale-rose color at the recollection.

"'Here, Miss,' I said, politely enough, for I thought him a woman, 'where are you going?'

"'To see the missus,' he said, and ducked me a curtsey.

"I told him if he had any word for Mrs. Randolph I would see that it reached her. Then he tried to get by me.

"'Stop!' I said, and put out my hand to detain him.

"When, in pushing against the wall and ducking to get by me, his wig came off, and fell to the floor, I was that speechless, sir, he might

Digitized by Google

have gone on, only he was as confused as I was myself. He had short, curly, black hair; and for the first time I noticed the blue tint of his close-shaved beard under the flour dust he had rubbed on his chin in the cook room.

"'Here, you rascal!' I said, taking hold of him as he stooped to get his wig. Then he stood up boldly, seeing he was discovered, and laughed at me.

"'Let up!' he said, for I had gripped him tight.

"'What does this mean?' I asked.

"He put his hand in the pocket of his dress and brought out a twenty-dollar bill.

"'Do you like the looks of that?' he asked. The brazenness of the wretch took away my breath, sir. 'There are four more of these — an even hundred round simoleons — if you'll let me go up to the rooms of Mr. Randolph. Say it quick, and I'll run right along, and no one shall ever know you had a hand in it. I'm the representative of the *Evening Moon*.' He took out his card as proof.

"When I said, 'No!' he tried to bribe me into telling him something about you. He said his paper had received a 'tip' from a reliable source that you were not Julian Randolph, and they wanted to know about it. For that reason he

Digitized by Google

had got into the house as a servant girl. And he said he would double the sum offered, make it two hundred dollars, if I would give him information on that point, or would let him go to your rooms to see you. What he expected to do, sir, if he saw you, I don't know. But I marched him out of the hall, and then calling the butler we turned him out of the house."

While telling this Jerome so far forgot himself that he waved his hands dramatically, while the rosy pink of his face deepened and faded and then deepened again with the tremendous excitement of his adventure. And withal, as I learned later from other sources, he told the story quietly enough and without self-exploitation; for it seems the young masquerader had fairly fought to get back into the hall and up the stairs, when he found his offered bribes were in vain and that he was about to be bundled into the street.

A renewed sense of the dangers of my situation was thus impressed upon me. Behind the attempt I saw the hand of Courtney Lane. He suspected me and had communicated his suspicions to this newspaper.

The more I thought about it the more Miss Hansborough's suggestion that I was afraid of the reporters startled me. I feared she had

Digitized by Google

seen through my pretensions, or suspected me. For I had ceased to declare that I was not Julian Randolph, believing if I was to aid Mrs. Randolph I must maintain her faith in me as her husband. Otherwise, I feared I could do nothing.

In one way my task was ridiculously easy. When I stumbled, or was in danger of stumbling, Julian Randolph's eccentricity was the staff on which I leaned. Whatever I did or failed in doing could be credited to my lost memory and to my inherent capacity for doing a thing as no one else ever did it before or was likely to do it afterwards.

Lane had not returned to the house, as he had promised, nor had he hastened to draw a revocation of that power of attorney. The time-consuming demands of certain business before the Superior Court was his first excuse. Then I learned he had left the city, after sending to Mrs. Randolph a note stating that an important matter had called him away suddenly. I knew what that important matter was — he had gone to Philadelphia.

But while he was trying in Philadelphia to get a line on my past I was scanning our probable battlefield and preparing for him as well as I could; and was getting a wonderful amount

Digitized by Google

of happiness out of my new position, in spite of a condemning conscience and anticipatory sufferings.

So the evening came, in which I was to meet some of the people who had written and wired their congratulations.

That afternoon the *Evening Moon* had sensation "scare-heads" above a half-column of guesswork which it probably denominated a "beat." Though the name of Julian Randolph did not appear, all who had read of his "return" would know what was meant.

"You do not believe any of that stuff?" I said, when we had gone through the slurring questions and broad hints of "mystery" lying behind that "return."

Mrs. Randolph looked at me with frightened eyes. I confess it was a foolish question, when the part I was enacting is considered.

"Julian," she said, "don't be silly!"

"Can we go through the ordeal to-night, after this?" I said, looking at the offensive newspaper.

"Very easily," she said, with sweet serenity.

Yet I confess to a great dread when the ordeal came.

The affair was supposed to be quite informal; which only meant that, though they could not

Digitized by Google

be wholly omitted, there was to be as little as possible of the fuss and feathers of fashionable society.

Mrs. Randolph wore that distracting dress of pure white, with the contrasting red rose as the only color. The brilliance of her complexion, the heavenly blue of her eyes, the glory of her shining brown hair, drew such attention that I was quite jealous. Miss Hansborough, her evening dress displaying dazzling shoulders, helped us to "receive."

We stood just within the entrance to what Mrs. Randolph called "our garden," a large glassed-in space filled with palms and flowers, with a fountain splashing in the centre, and an orchestra hidden behind the palms playing popular airs and Strauss waltzes. Brilliant lights flooded the "garden," making it light as day.

The whole gave me a sense of the wealth of Mrs. Randolph which hitherto I had not felt. She had been so girlish, so natural, so unaffected and affectionate, that the fact of her wealth had not been impressed on me thoroughly, in spite of the richness of the brownstone mansion, the retinue of servants, my valet, and those indications of Courtney Lane's piratical attempt.

Digitized by Google

I recall that in their reports the next morning the newspapers spoke of the "distinguished company." There were many names honored in two hemispheres, as one of the papers stated. How I bore myself under the strain of meeting these people, many of whom I was supposed to know, puzzles me still; but I met them, supported by Mrs. Randolph and her sister.

Occasionally there was an introduction, as —

"Mr. Sturtevant, let me make you acquainted with my husband."

And Mr. Sturtevant, a high-shouldered, eyeglassed man, who looked to be a literary burner of midnight oil, but who was really a Wall Street banker, murmured my name, mentioned casually the state of the weather, openly flattered Mrs. Randolph on her appearance, and, crowded by others, drifted on.

Later in the evening I came near getting a "cropper." The dancing was in progress and Mrs. Randolph had been torn from my side by Sir Philip Cuthbert, who would not be denied. It was then that John Denton, whom all New York knows as a "society favorite" and a "first nighter," remarked with a laugh as he squeezed my hand, finding me for the moment alone:

"You recall what you told me at the Bachelors' Club the day before you were married?"

Digitized by Google

He beamed amiably.

I didn't remember it, of course, and I had to say so.

"Harry Tremaine was with us. Recall it now?"

"No," I said, in desperation.

Denton looked hard at me as he stirred his glass.

"Oh, well, if you've forgotten it!" he said, with a harsh laugh. "It was only a few thousand that I hold your IOU for as a result of that poker game. You went abroad, I understood, and I've heard nothing of it since. But if you want to repudiate it—"

He drank his wine.

"I have no such intention," I declared, uncomfortably hot. "I had simply forgot it."

His manner was arctic as he walked away.

Near the close, when many had gone and the hour was late, or, rather, early, I being again alone for a few moments, Jerome came by me, brushing my shoulder quite as if by accident, to attract my attention.

"At the farther end of the garden, near the door," he whispered. "It's Courtney Lane, with that reporter. And I know that the reporter was not invited."

His communication startled me. I looked,

Digitized by Google

and saw Lane and a slim, dark young man, with eyeglasses perched on his thin nose, coming toward me.

"How the reporter got in I don't know," said Jerome; "but he shall he thrown out, sir, if you give the word."

Mrs. Randolph, dancing with Harold DeKoster, floated by me. Her azure eyes were shining, her cheeks like pink peonies; her diaphanous white draperies half revealed and half concealed her loveliness. My eyes followed her with anxious longing. Behind her came Miss Hansborough and her escort; but my eyes were for Mrs. Randolph alone. Lucky dog — DeKoster! Something choked in my throat when I saw her smile up into his face. And it made my sight blur strangely. For the moment I forgot Courtney Lane and the reporter who were making their way slowly toward me. Mrs. Randolph did not see Lane, I observed.

Then he stood before me, the reporter just in his rear cocking an ear forward. Lane fixed on me his eyes of steely blue. The reporter looked away, as if not listening.

"Could I have a word with you, Mr. Randolph?"

Again there was that queer emphasis on the name.

Digitized by Google

I hesitated; then answered, boldly and defiantly:

"A dozen of them, if you like."

"Can we go somewhere?" he asked, glancing about.

"There is a room over there," I said, nodding toward the palms. "We can go in there, if you have anything of importance to say to me."

"I consider it important," he declared.

I stepped round the palms, and moved toward the small room that lay behind them. Some of the guests came out as we approached and left it empty. The reporter followed Lane, without invitation; and I saw Jerome hovering behind, looking solicitously at me, as if begging permission to do something desperate. His usually white face was again a rosy pink.

Lane slid into a chair by the table.

"Bring the gentleman some whiskey and soda," I said to the waiter who had followed us in. "Or do you prefer a cocktail?" I added, looking at Lane coldly.

"The whiskey and soda, please," he said, carelessly.

He half veiled his cold eyes, as he looked at me.

"A Martini cocktail," I said to the waiter.

The pulsing music of the orchestra overflowed into this quiet retreat in drowsy ca-

Digitized by Google

dences. Just beyond the door stood the reporter, staring at the dancers with his black eyes, yet with his elephantine ears turned in our direction, I knew; and not far from him Jerome still hovered uneasily. I smiled, and returned Lane's look with one of contempt and defiance.

The whiskey and soda and Martini cocktail were brought.

"That is all," I said to the waiter.

The automaton vanished.

"Now what is it?" I demanded of Lane.

The cocktail and the whiskey and soda stood untouched before us. My face was red enough without the stimulus of drink. Lane was still calm and collected.

"Just this," he said, leaning toward me, with one firm white hand on the table. "I have been to Philadelphia!"

Digitized by Google

X

COURTNEY LANE THREATENS

"I HAVE been to Philadelphia!" Lane repeated, boring me with his steel-blue eyes.

I laughed harshly and defiantly.

"I guessed as much."

"You know what I have discovered?"

"*I* have discovered that *you* are a fool and a meddler!" I flashed at him.

"I have discovered that your mysterious absence from your chair as instructor in physics at the Gilbert Porter Institute is causing more than a mild sensation!"

"It is pleasant to be remembered, after we have departed," I murmured, clinking my fingers against my glass until the cherry in the liquor danced and sparkled.

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"What should I say?" I asked sweetly.

"If I go to Mrs. Randolph with this you know what will happen!"

"I'm sure I do not," I declared. "Pray enlighten me."

"Well, *you are not Julian Randolph!*"

Digitized by Google

"No?" I cried. I sipped my cocktail to cover any possible confusion, though I believed I now had my nerves well under control. "Dear me! Who, then, am I?"

"You are Louis Armitage."

"This is interesting," I observed, and I wrote the initials on the table with the wet foot of the glass.

"You know that I can land you in jail for this deception," he said, his low voice trembling.

"I am surprised that you do not then."

I waved my hand toward the listening reporter.

"You did well to bring with you that representative of the *Evening Sewer*. I expected you would feel at home in the company of his kind. I've noticed, when travelling in the South and West, that buzzards often fly in pairs."

His face flushed.

"You defy me?" he said, in that same low tone, while the flush seemed to creep from his face into his cold eyes and lend them a sudden flame.

I laughed, leaning back in my chair.

"Lane," I said, "I have seen through *you* from the first, and —"

"And I through you!" he cried, forgetting himself and lifting his voice.

Digitized by Google

Your imagination quite equals your audacity, and your dishonesty."

"Dishonesty? What do you mean by that?"

"I hardly think you need to ask." I lowered my voice as a hint to him to lower his. "And now you are exhibiting yourself as a first-class specimen of the genus *Fool*. I was never in that school you speak of in my life."

He gulped his astonishment.

"But — but," he stammered, "you confessed it yourself, in the presence of Mrs. Randolph."

"I was then simply answering a Fool according to his folly."

"You deny it?"

He half rose from the table, to sink back trembling.

"If it is necessary for me to take the trouble to deny it, I deny it; yes."

"Then I'll produce the proofs," he threatened. "I'll expose you — I'll publish you to the world. I'll brand you for what you are; and I'll —"

"Lane," I said, "for Heaven's sake, don't shriek! Tell that scoundrelly reporter whatever you want to, at another time — you'll do that, any way; so that I don't see why you should have bothered to sneak him in here; but remember Mrs. Randolph and her guests."

Digitized by Google

"I'll publish you to the world, and I'll have you arrested for the impostor that you are!"

"If you undertake anything so foolish, Lane, it will simply hasten my exposure of you, and you will have a long time to think it over and regret it behind the walls of Sing Sing."

Again I sipped my cocktail and smiled. Mrs. Randolph could confuse me and bring my heart into my throat by a word or a look; but with a man, and a man whom I hated, it was different; and having prepared my battle lines I at the moment felt that I could defy Courtney Lane.

"Let me tell you what I know," I said, speaking with growing boldness. "And I should be glad if that long-eared reporter would put this in his paper; his readers would find it interesting. He would be able to say that Courtney Lane, acting as the business agent of Mrs. Julian Randolph, whom he had deceived into thinking him an honorable gentleman, had been swindling her from the moment he became her legal adviser and financial agent until now. He would also be able to say that after Courtney Lane had been requested by her to prepare a revocation of the power of attorney he held and had wilfully neglected and refused to do so, she had revoked it, without consulting him further; and that steps are being taken looking

Digitized by Google

to his arrest on charges of embezzlement and the criminal diversion of her funds."

Twice Lane tried to interrupt me, and I saw the fire in the hard blue eyes die out and the face show a trace of pallor. He seemed to shrivel behind that immaculate shirt front.

"The power of attorney has not been revoked!" he protested.

"It is to be," I claimed, "and the other things will follow the moment you open your mud batteries on me and try to bespatter me through the columns of the sensational press. Your reporter is listening to this; let him put it down."

"My financial dealings with Mrs. Randolph have been strictly honorable!" he sputtered.

"You will have a chance to prove that, if you go farther on the line you have chosen. So, take warning! I am Julian Randolph; and only the fact that you are an invited guest here, though an unwelcome one, and that I do not want a scene, keeps me from kicking you through that door, and having you ejected from the house, together with your elephant-eared friend, whom you dishonorably smuggled in."

"You threaten me?" he said. His eyes held a gleam of fury.

"I defy you!"

Digitized by Google

Jerome had bustled to the door.

"Something I can do, sir?" he asked, poking his pink face into the room and staring hard at Lane.

"Thank you, nothing, Jerome," I said, rising from the table.

Lane got to his feet unsteadily.

"I'll see you again!" he said.

The words were low and the tone a threat.

He left the room and hurried away, and the reporter followed him. I was well pleased with the courageous front I had shown, and its result. Jerome was still filled with resentment.

"That reporter ought to have been invited to leave," he protested.

The company was breaking up, and I hastened to place myself beside Mrs. Randolph, to receive the parting words of our guests.

Digitized by Google

I LOOKED at Jerome, wondering if I could use him, in a matter that promised to be peculiarly delicate. He might have the willingness, but did he possess the requisite tact and discretion?

His nose was almost patrician; yet he was a servant to the tips of his white fingers. We have not many of his class native to this country. Your true American is like one of Napoleon's soldiers, in that he believes he carries the baton of a Field Marshal in his knapsack. It is this that has made us the Nation we are. Ambition is a good thing; and it is well to hitch your wagon to a star, if you have the wagon. I decided that I could not trust the matter to Jerome. Something more than the subservient willingness of a servant was needed.

Finding, to my delight, that Mrs. Randolph had gone out, I determined to undertake the thing myself, and sent Jerome away. The next few minutes I spent in studying the directories, and kept the telephone wires hot. Then I sat

Digitized by Google

down in a flutter of guilty excitement, like the small boy who is planning so slip past the parental eye and play with those horrid McGinnis children in the neighboring alley.

When I thought I had waited long enough I tiptoed down-stairs, my breath coming fast as I did so. The auto-car I had summoned from the garage was there. I could have shouted when I beheld it. The chauffeur put his fingers to his cap in salutation, as I ran down the steps. No reporters were roosting on the carved, bronze railings. I leaped lightly in, taking a seat beside him.

"Broadway!" I said; "move her along!" I dared not look back.

The chauffeur "moved her along" so quickly that we were a hundred feet from the house and gathering speed before I observed that he was not the man I had expected. More than once while looking through the windows of the library I had seen Mrs. Randolph's chauffeur.

"Hello!" I said, staring at him. "How is this? You are not Mrs. Randolph's chauffeur."

He looked straight ahead. I was sure Mrs. Randolph's chauffeur was smooth-faced and younger; this man wore a moustache, and had eyeglasses under his disfiguring and disguising goggles.

Digitized by Google

"I am *your* chauffeur," he answered, giving the steering wheel a turn and sending the automobile round an interfering carriage. "You didn't know that?"

He laughed.

"Come!" I cried; "this won't do! I don't know you, and I won't go any farther. Stop the auto!"

I caught him by the arm.

"Listen," he said, but without taking his eyes off the road before him. "I am not Mrs. Randolph's chauffeur, nor yours. I'm a representative of the *Mirror*. I couldn't get at you in any other way. The chauffeur isn't in it, and isn't to blame. Don't you want to make a statement to the public? There are some curious rumors afloat. You ought to correct them. If you have enemies who are lying about you, why let them do all the talking? Do you catch on?"

I had dropped back against the cushions, breathless.

"What are the rumors?" I asked.

"That you are not the man you pretend to be — not Julian Randolph. Hadn't we better take this cross street — it's not so crowded — and talk it over?"

"Yes," I said, "turn that way. This is startling. What else is being reported?"

Digitized by Google

The automobile crossed Broadway and headed toward the North River.

"The statement carries its corollary, that you are a deliberate impostor. But I have heard it hinted also that you are a madman."

He glanced at me.

"Is it your belief that I am a madman?" I asked.

He grinned, with a twitching of his reddish moustache.

"You don't look it."

"Then I am either Julian Randolph, or a pretender?"

"Just so."

"Who is saying these things about me?"

"They are in the air."

"Come!" I urged. "If they are in the air, somebody's putty-blower put them there. Who is he?"

"If I should say I know, and tell you, I might find myself in a sling," was his cautious answer.

I thought a moment before I answered, while the auto-car swung with a lurch round a group of heedless children.

"Unless you tell me that I shall tell you nothing."

"It has been hinted," he said, still cautiously, "that these stories come from the office of

Digitized by Google

Courtney Lane, Mrs. Randolph's financial representative. Mind you, I don't say that this is so; I don't know anything about it. I only heard a rumor buzzing about like a bottle-fly over a bit of putridity. As a newspaper scavenger, serving up odorous morsels to a stench-loving public, I was under compulsion to follow the scented trail of the bottle-fly. Perhaps my ears and my nose deceived me. In any event, to change the metaphor, I am merely a siphon connecting the dear public with its sources of information, and as such I have neither thoughts nor feelings. I perform my mission, and that is all."

He grinned again, with another twitching and lifting of the reddish moustache.

"What is Courtney Lane going to do about it?" I asked, trying to hide the start his words had given me.

"Ah!" he said, "I wish I knew. It would be good for two columns."

While the automobile moved slowly on I thought at railroad speed. Why should I not make a statement to the public? The flings and innuendoes of the *Evening Moon* had gone unanswered by me. The *Mirror* was the more reputable paper. Still, was it wise to recur to the matter at all?

Digitized by Google

"If I should make a statement you would publish it just as it was given to you?"

"Surely."

"You may set down then," I said deliberately, "that I am Julian Randolph, who after an extended absence is home again, attending to business. You may add it is hinted that a certain person who aspires to be a prominent figure in the financial world, and who took advantage of my absence to enrich himself at my expense, is now on the verge of criminal prosecution. Evidence is being gathered which will expose his criminality and send him to prison. As soon as certain investigations are completed the arrest is to follow."

"Is that all?"

"It is enough," I said.

"But about your absence, and your mysterious return?"

"There was nothing mysterious connected with either."

"I can say that?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Would you mind stating where you were while away?"

"That is not the affair of the public!"

"But the public has curiosity."

"Morbid curiosity. If it must have some-

Digitized by Google

thing, say that I was hunting lions in Africa and looking for one of the mysterious sources of Lake Tchad."

He grinned again.

"You'll let me embellish the hunting part? I suppose you found that source of Lake Tchad."

"As many sources of Lake Tchad, and as much hunting, as you like."

He stopped the auto-car and began to turn it about.

"What now?" I asked.

"I'm going to take you to that garage over there. I want to get this into the *Mirror* this afternoon. You'll excuse me, I know; I've barely time to do it."

In front of the garage he pulled off his goggles, and leaped out. I saw his eyes behind their crystal-clear glasses, light brown in color, clear as the glasses themselves. He smiled, with that characteristic lifting of his moustache, and extended his hand, standing beside the right forward wheel, with one foot on the curb.

"I'm obliged to you, Mr. Randolph," he said warmly. "I'll treat you fair. See the next edition of the *Mirror*. And I don't mind saying to you now that for this other fellow, Lane, I have no earthly use. My reason goes back some

Digitized by Google

months, and I haven't time to tell it. But he threw me down — bit of speculation, you know; little flyer in Wall Street. Yes, he threw me down hard. So I was doubly anxious to see you and get your side of the story."

He withdrew his hand, and the next moment was running to catch a train of the Elevated, which was coming into view far up the street.

"Even a siphon has feelings after all, it seems," I thought, as I watched him. And I was pleased with myself, and with what I had done.

Digitized by Google

XII

ASBURY RAND

I LEFT the automobile at the garage, with instructions as to where it was to be sent. I was free now to go whithersoever I willed, and I willed to carry out the idea which had sent me forth into the busy streets. Less than half an hour later I was in a big Broadway building and an elevator was shooting me skyward with frantic New York speed.

I got out at the tenth floor, and soon found the room I sought. On the door was this office card:

ASBURY RAND
PRIVATE DETECTIVE

I knocked and was admitted.

Mr. Rand sat alone, pondering by a window, smoking a thick, black cigar. The office boy who admitted me had vanished, like the imp of the magician; I hardly knew where he had gone. But I was prepared for strange disappearances, secret doors, sliding panels, human

Digitized by Google

eyes staring from the eyes of the pictures on the walls; if upon my entrance Mr. Rand's chair had dropped him through the floor I was ready not to be too much astonished. For was not this a detective's office, and had I not read Sherlock Holmes, and Gaboriau, and Edgar Allan Poe? But Mr. Rand sat quietly in his chair, and the pieces of office furniture seemed not disposed to turn somersaults and stand upon their several heads.

In another minute I was telling my story (so much of it as I wished to tell), lying my way through with the perspiring courage of a machete wielder in a tropical jungle. To better his hearing, he laid his cigar on the window ledge.

"Yes, yes," he said at intervals, as I plunged on.

"You will take up this case?" I asked.

"Yes, certainly; glad to do so."

"And you'll find the proof I want — that Courtney Lane has been swindling Mrs. Randolph; that is, if such proof is to be had, of which I am confident?"

"Assuredly. If there are such proofs we'll get them."

He rubbed his palms together and beamed on me when I was through. It was his turn to ask questions and mine to give answers.

Digitized by Google

"When will you begin?" I queried, after he had ceased to question me.

"To-day — at once."

I thought of my limp pocketbook, and feared he would ask a retainer, but he did not.

To prove that he valued the commission I intrusted to him he touched a bell. A quick young man jerked into the room — he seemed to come out of the wall; but there was a door which I had not observed, and I had no doubt he had been behind that door listening. However, this heightened my opinion of the detective abilities of Mr. Asbury Rand. I looked at the door to ascertain if any little peep-holes were bored in it, but saw none.

"Jarvis," said Rand, giving him a pencilled slip of paper, "take this to Jones, and tell him I must see him at once on a case of importance. If he is on anything just now, tell him to turn it over to Haney."

The young man jerked out of the room, vanishing through that door.

"Jones is my most reliable man," Rand explained. "I'll put him on this case immediately."

As I left Rand's office, I reflected with increasing confidence that I had started the wheels of the Juggernaut car that would eventually crush Courtney Lane.

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Randolph was still out when I got back, but I encountered Miss Hansborough. Faultlessly attired, the nut-brown maid had just come in from the street. She looked at me in a strange way, apparently aware that I had been absent from the house.

"I have taken your advice," I said. "I have shown the reporters that there is no powder in their pistols — but that there is in mine!"

She stared an instant, then recalled her words and comprehended.

"Tell me about it."

Her brown eyes smiled invitingly, and she moved toward the sitting room.

"What have you done, you reckless boy?" she demanded when we were in the room together.

"You know what you advised?"

"Yes, I remember something."

"I did just that. You read that slanderous report in the *Evening Moon.* Courtney Lane inspired it. I have just denied it, to a reporter of the *Mirror;* and have said, in addition, that investigations are being made which will lead to the arrest of a certain man who has been misapplying my funds in my absence. Courtney Lane will know who that man is."

Miss Hansborough was a girl not easily startled, but she was startled now.

Digitized by Google

"Why, Julian!" she protested. "Don't you think that was rather — er — unwise? Mr. Lane has done nothing out of the way, really. Kitty and I are under many obligations to him. I hope you didn't mention his name?"

"His name will not appear in the *Mirror*," I assured her.

"Oh, I hope not!"

"You don't believe Lane has been swindling your sister — and you?"

"Certainly not. The idea is preposterous."

In vain I tried to show her that it was anything but preposterous.

When Mrs. Randolph arrived, she bore a copy of the *Mirror*, and had seen that "interview." Her face was flushed to a deep pink. I felt guilty when I saw her with that newspaper in her hand. Yet I still could admire her beauty, for in the light gray street dress she wore she was very attractive, in spite of that flush.

"Julian," she said, having come straight into the sitting room, where I still lingered with Miss Hansborough, "did you say these things to a reporter?"

She could not believe I had said anything of the kind, and expected me to deny it.

"Yes," I admitted, "I made those state-

Digitized by Google

ments; that is, I suppose I did. Let me see what is there."

The reporter had been fair; the interview, though much elaborated, had my main points unchanged. The lion hunting and the Lake Tchad explorations were fine bits of romancing.

"Oh, well!" (she laughed, and threw the offending *Mirror* into a chair,) "I thought it had been made up out of whole cloth, by the reporter."

Her blue eyes met the brown eyes of her sister with an understanding glance. (I knew they would talk the whole thing over together later.) And she changed the subject.

Another side of her character was revealed to me. Out of the nebulous blur of impressions, of which at first her piquant beauty and her sapphire eyes had been all predominant, I was gaining other glimpses; I was beginning to know her, and yet was made to feel that I could never know her completely. Now she was the philosopher. She was able to accept me and all my supposed foibles with that rare complacency which is the peculiar possession of a philosophical nature and can never be acquired.

Digitized by Google

XIII

THE JOINT IN MY ARMOR

HARVARD had played Princeton, at Princeton; and Benson, on the way back to Cambridge, had stopped off between trains, in New York, with the permission of his captain. He came at my request to my rooms, where I sought vainly for a good beginning for what I wanted to say. It is sometimes easier to open a jack-pot or a can of clams than it is to open a conversation.

"Can't you stay in New York a few hours longer?" I begged at length. "I need you."

He gave me a sharp look.

"I have had a talk with Courtney Lane," I went on, bluntly; "a talk which he sought, with a newspaper man standing by; and he threatened me."

"Threatened you?"

His gray eyes widened in astonishment.

I detailed what had been said by Lane at the reception, in the light in which I wished him to see it. I could not tell him what I really feared and believed; that would have been to confess

Digitized by Google

that I was not Julian Randolph. My story amazed him, of course.

"You observe the position I'm in?"

"Yes, I see," he admitted. "But he'd never dare do it."

"Lane is enriching himself at her expense," I declared, "and I want you to get proof of it for me. Find out who his brokers are, and you'll be striking the right trail."

He heard me through almost incredulously.

"I'd be willing to do anything possible to accommodate you," he declared; and then he began to explain.

It was that confounded ball game between Harvard and Yale, and the rigid training rules, which it seems are like the laws of the Medes and Persians.

"I'm here on sufferance, you know, and for a very short time only. A man on the team and in training has to stay right with the team, and eat at the training table, and all that; otherwise he is dropped. So, you see!"

"But," I urged, "you can get this information for me without much delay. Perhaps you know some one in New York, connected with the Stock Exchange, to whom you can go?"

He thought a moment.

"Yes," he said, "I do know such a man; an

Digitized by Google

old friend of our family. It's after office hours, but I can probably see him at his home. I'll do that much for you, and run the risk."

Shortly after Benson's hurried departure in search of information, I encountered Mrs. Randolph. Her face was so bright, so hopeful, so happy that, if anything could have done so, a look into it would have quite driven away my uneasy fears.

"Julian," she announced, "I've had the *Idler* put in commission, and she is now in the East River, with a captain and full crew. The orders were given immediately after Doctor Thompson called on you, though I didn't tell you then. It seems to me I can't wait to try her."

My heart gave a bound.

"We'll go aboard at once," I cried, with pretended gayety, "and we'll sail the seas over. We'll be Jasons, and hunt for the Golden Fleece of happiness."

"It is here," she said simply.

Yet her azure eyes clouded a little. Foreboding still lurked in some corner of her loving heart.

"Yes, I'm sure it is," I agreed.

She beamed on me. I was getting better rapidly, was her thought; I was ready to take

Digitized by Google

this second part of Doctor Thompson's prescription, even though I had thrown his medicine out of the window.

Oh, the love and confidence of women; and the despicable deceit of men! What would men do if it were not for this love and confidence? They would do worse than "Hottentot," and in an incredibly short space of time. I feel sure that Robinson Crusoe must have been a miserable specimen, in spite of the glamour thrown round him by the cunning pen of his biographer. Men just couldn't stand it.

Benson returned without information. But almost at the same moment a sealed note from my detective startled me. It stated that Lane was about to move to have me examined by alienists for supposed insanity, with the purpose of committing me to a sanitarium. Thus he had met my thrust and struck back with staggering promptness.

I saw that he could trap me, and would do so. My proofs of his financial iniquity had not been gathered. I did not fear the alienists so much as I feared what might be disclosed — that I was not Julian Randolph. Yet with the alienists there was no telling what might happen. Men and women have been imprisoned for supposed mental afflictions who were

Digitized by Google

saner than the stupid doctors who examined them or the arrogant judges who pronounced them mentally unsound.

At dinner Benson tried to be gay, and made a failure of it. I saw that there was trouble between him and Miss Hansborough. I didn't know it until long afterward, but the coolness observable was occasioned by some considerations concerning myself. Benson intensely and loyally desired to return at once to Harvard; Miss Hansborough and her sister had what they assumed to be potent reasons why he should not, even though his failure to do so might wrench or break his relations with the Harvard nine. He was remaining, grimly and under protest, fearing the crash of the Harvard guillotine. A man will do many things for the woman he loves, but unless he does them with abounding cheerfulness that woman is likely to undervalue his sacrifices.

Though I am sure Benson didn't know whether he ate clams or oysters, Miss Hansborough affected not to notice it. Her smile was serene and enigmatical; her talk was far away, about somebody in Newport, and a certain dance at Bar Harbor and what the women wore. She appeared to be properly interested as she recalled these things, but certainly no

Digitized by Google

one else was. I am convinced that my own manners were hopelessly funereal. Mrs. Randolph struggled vainly with the burden thus imposed on her.

But under this cloud of gloom, having reached my decision, I was laying my plans. There is an old saw, and it needs no new teeth, which says that discretion is the better part of valor. I was resolved to be discreet, and run away. I found my opportunity when Mrs. Randolph spoke again of the *Idler*.

"Why can't we get ready for a short voyage at once?" I urged.

I feared all would see the eager flame in my face.

"It would do you good," she agreed. "Doctor Thompson" (blessings on his gray head! I resolved never to belittle him again) "urged it, you know. We could take Jack to Boston."

"We might run up to Newport," said Miss Hansborough sweetly.

But she did not look at Benson. If *he* went to the Sahara, and rode camels, was nothing to her, apparently. How can so charming a girl do such things? It puzzles me. Benson was a fine fellow.

"Just the thing!" I cried. "We'll go to Newport."

Digitized by Google

I was determined, once we were under way, that we would go much farther in the *Idler* than Newport.

"Jack could take the train there for Cambridge," Miss Hansborough added, sticking the knife under his fifth rib as coolly as an Italian duellist. "He has been *so* anxious to get back to Harvard, you know. It would be almost as quick as going by train to-morrow from here."

"That's true enough," I agreed.

I would have agreed to anything that led my way. Benson glanced at me reproachfully. But, Heavens, it was not I who was trying to destroy his happiness!

Mrs. Randolph's spirits had risen perceptibly; and we all pretended to be much interested, and very happy. So we spent the evening talking of the *Idler*, of Newport, and possible destinations. Such conversation is not difficult, and I got through it easily.

When Benson, though he had remained so much longer than he felt he ought, hurried to his hotel, it was with the intention of sending a telegram to Cambridge, and remaining in New York until some time the next day.

But in the morning he received a message that was like a slap in the face. It was from

Digitized by Google

his captain, informing him curtly that he could stay in New York as much as he liked, as he no longer had a place on the nine.

This bit of news, startling in its unexpectedness (though it ought to have been anticipated), we did not receive at the house until Benson, distressed and shaken, arrived with it himself.

We had been discussing this awhile, when I chanced to pass into the hall, and saw there the servant who had delivered to me surreptitiously that note of warning from Asbury Rand. He beckoned, and I was sure he had another note from my shrewd detective. I was correct in this. He placed it in my hand, and chuckled slyly as I paid him for this act of treachery to his mistress. The note repeated and confirmed the statement that Courtney Lane was on the point of taking steps to have me examined by alienists.

Mrs. Randolph came upon me while I was reading this.

"Something for me to see?" she asked, searching my pale face.

"No!" I answered hoarsely. "It is nothing; nothing!"

But I was now in a panic, and ready for instant flight.

The message from Benson's captain caused

Digitized by Google

a readjustment of our plans, in spite of my protests. The impossibility of sailing until the next day was brought forward, and backed with proofs. With a continually-increasing uneasiness, which Mrs. Randolph must have noticed, I was forced to surrender.

One thing I observed, and failed to understand. Benson, who had been for rushing to Cambridge in the hope of mending matters for himself there, ceased to speak of it with anxiety, after a talk with Miss Hansborough.

With the next morning, though I arose early and tried to hurry the start, vexatious delays came. There was much telephoning on the part of Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough. In the midst of this, word came that the yacht needed more coal.

I found time to call up Asbury Rand and urge him to haste and diligence; I desired, if cornered, to have some bomb of evidence to hurl at the head of Courtney Lane. Rand declared that his man Jones was pushing the investigation with all speed, and promised to report discoveries as soon as they were made. I said nothing to him of my intention of immediately leaving New York.

My impatience grew feverish as the noon hour came and went. Bundles and boxes were

Digitized by Google

pouring in from everywhere, and pouring out again down to the *Idler*.

It was four o'clock, and I was standing by the library windows, having taken my position there two hours before in anticipation of the coming of an officer to arrest me, when Mrs. Randolph, arrayed in a gray travelling dress, entered, flushed, but triumphant. She and Jerome had been assisting the distracted maid.

"Thank Heaven, that last trunk is packed!"

"How long do we have to wait yet?" I asked, with an ear trained on the street entrance.

"We are almost ready now, dear."

Jerome came in, hurried, yet deferential.

"Shall I have the chauffeur bring the auto round again?" he asked of her.

"Yes, Jerome," she answered; "we're almost ready now. Margaret" (to the nut-brown maid who swished past the door), "you're ready now, aren't you?"

"In just a minute," came back the answer.

"Jerome" (this from Mrs. Randolph), "phone to the wharf and see if that coal is all on board. Tell them we're coming now."

A few minutes later the big touring car stormed up to the curb. Yet it was nearly five o'clock when we entered it.

"Let her go!" I said to the chauffeur as soon

Digitized by Google

as we were seated. I couldn't resist the slang; I wanted to fly, for in every man approaching I fancied I saw an officer. My anxiety was so apparent that it made Mrs. Randolph anxious for me, and she was ready to abet me in my desire for haste.

We shot away from the house and down the avenue with such speed that soon I was anxious in another direction — lest we should be in trouble for over-speeding.

When the river burst on our vision, with all the water craft — ferry-boats, tugs, yachts — more than half of them, it seemed to me, screeching whistles, and I beheld the shining white hull of the *Idler* (Mrs. Randolph pointed her out to me), I did not try to hide my delight.

"Oh, this is great!"

I waved my hat.

Mrs. Randolph's eyes glistened.

"Do you like it?"

"Like it?" (In that moment I forgave her and her sister for all our trying delays.) "It is indescribably beautiful."

"You always enjoyed our little trips on the *Idler*."

"This will be the most enjoyable of all," I declared.

Digitized by Google

At the wharf a boat awaited us, manned by bronzed, seaman-like fellows in white duck, their oars up-ended. A little coxswain stood in the stern-sheets touching his cap.

Miss Hansborough was about to let herself be handed down first into the boat, but stopped, hesitating and coloring.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, biting her lip in vexation. "After all, I've forgotten that jacket!" (She looked at Mrs. Randolph.) "Lizette, or Jerome, or some one, will just have to go back for it."

I had held in a long time, and here was more delay; the red of vexation showed in my face. Mrs. Randolph saw it and suggested the shops of Newport. But no, Miss Hansborough must have that jacket; none other would do. So Jerome, who was already aboard the yacht, had to be brought ashore, and posted back to the house in a cab.

As we were rowed out to the *Idler* I watched the receding shore with apprehension.

"She is a dream!" I said, as a wave lifted the yacht and showed the sea-green paint below the water line. But I was thinking of Courtney Lane and possible officers.

The beauty and spaciousness of the *Idler* astonished and gratified me. I did not spend much time in looking about, however, but

Digitized by Google

watched the shore and the river. The auto-car had been run upon a float and was being towed out, to be hoisted aboard. This was troublesome and consumed time.

Jack Benson arrived and joined Miss Hansborough. Though I knew he was anxious and disquieted, he hid it well. They came where I stood with Mrs. Randolph and with us looked over the rail. With the exception of our little group every one was hurrying. None guessed of course my burning impatience; they hurried because they had been ordered to do so. Yet to me even this haste was snail-like. There is no harder task than to smile and talk of inconsequential things at such a time.

The big Mercedes had been hoisted aboard, lashed, and covered with canvas, on the forward deck, before Jerome appeared. He was running as soon as he left his cab, and when he did not find a yacht's boat awaiting him he jumped into a disreputable shell that had been clinging like a brown barnacle to the wharf, and was rowed off to the *Idler* in that. I had a feeling that his haste was portentous, and I was first to meet him at the *Idler's* rail, giving him my hand to assist him aboard. His face was flushed.

"What is it, Jerome?" I said.

Digitized by Google

"I didn't just understand it," he answered in an undertone; "but before I left the house an officer came with papers for you, sir. He was put out because you were gone and the house was being closed. He asked questions, and demanded to know where you were. I lied to him, sir — I said I didn't know. But I think he followed me."

I pressed his hand.

"Keep still about — don't mention it to any one; I don't understand it, myself."

He glanced over his shoulder.

"I — I thought he meant to arrest you, sir."

"I've done nothing to warrant arrest," I said.

"No, sir; of course not, sir; but —"

"No more now, Jerome," I warned, for the women were advancing.

I turned, to meet Mrs. Randolph's pleased smile. Behind them — some distance behind — trailed Jack Benson, trying to take a proper interest in New York's wonderful water-front, as viewed from the East River.

Miss Hansborough took from Jerome the bundle which represented her jacket.

"We're ready to start, I believe," I said.

"You're the commander now, Julian," said Mrs. Randolph. "Here comes the captain for his orders."

Digitized by Google

Captain John Quinby, sunburnt and nautical, came up, lifting his white cap.

"We want to get under way at once, Captain," I said. "It's late" (I looked at my watch). "We'd like to be well out before night."

Though my commands lacked the nautical salt they were comprehensible.

"Yes, sir," he answered, again touching his cap. The declining sun glinted on its gold braid.

According to what I recalled of all I had read he should have said, "Aye, aye, sir!" in a thick, foggy, groggy voice, and hitched his trousers; but he didn't. Nor did he cast his weather eye at the clouds. But he put the *Idler* under way at once, which was the thing I wanted; and we were soon steaming down the East River.

Bedloe's Island was ahead, on the port bow, and the Brooklyn bridge was spider-webbing the stream behind, when I observed that a tug had shot out into the river and was following hard after us. Benson was standing with me on the after deck; Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough had just left my side. The captain came up to me, touching his cap respectfully.

Digitized by Google

"She is following us, Mr. Randolph," he announced, waving his hand significantly. "She signalled just now, and wants to speak to us. Shall we let her come alongside?"

Then the flag I had noticed before fluttered and dipped again and a rocket flashed into the evening sky.

I knew well what it meant. Courtney Lane had discovered that I was trying to give him the slip, and he was resolved to prevent it.

Digitized by Google

XIV

PURSUED

MRS. RANDOLPH had come on deck again, clad in cool blue linen, that was wonderfully becoming. She carried her yachting cap in her hand, and the breeze blew her brown hair about her eyes. Behind her, head and shoulders emerging from below, came the nut-brown maid in summery white. Jack Benson regarded the white vision hungrily.

Having called my attention to the pursuing tug and its signals, Captain Quinby waited for me to speak. I was sure the tug meant to overhaul us before we got out to sea, and that on her decks was not only the officer who had failed to find me at the house in Fifth Avenue, but Courtney Lane as well. Lane's daring and persistence amazed and angered me.

I answered Captain Quinby's question by requesting the use of the marine glasses he carried in his hand. Then I scanned the deck of the tug, which lay low in the water like a great turtle. The smoke from her funnel obscured

Digitized by Google

her deck, but I saw a group of three men, one of whom I was sure was Lane.

"Benson," I said quietly, "see if you can get the women to go below."

He hesitated, glancing at the girl in white, who had emerged full length above the companion-way.

"At least," I added desperately, "draw their attention from that tug!"

But the mischief was done; they had already seen the tug.

"Why, it seems to be following us!" I heard Miss Hansborough say in a tone of surprise.

I had not answered the captain.

"Ahead at full speed!" I ordered.

He stared.

"Not going to answer their signal?"

"No!" My tone was sharp. "I shall ignore them. Ahead, at full speed."

Benson was standing in awkward uncertainty, his hands in the pockets of his gray flannel outing coat. His face looked troubled. He had not started toward the women. I moved toward them myself now.

"Why is that tug following us?" Mrs. Randolph asked.

I took her arm and walked with her toward the rail.

Digitized by Google

"You recall that letter you saw me reading?" I said. "I didn't show it to you, but will later. There is a man in New York who has threatened to arrest me. He has chartered that tug I am sure, and is trying to overhaul the yacht. I don't intend to let him."

She looked straight into my eyes, startled, and her face paled. A strand of hair blew into her face and she brushed it away.

"You are sure?" she said, as if dazed.

"Quite sure."

"But I don't understand it; I don't —"

"I will explain it later. Just now I intend not to be taken. You are willing to trust me a little?"

I thought she hesitated, but when she answered her words were all that I could desire.

"Trust you, Julian? I would trust you with my life."

Yet it seemed lip-service; she still looked startled and doubtful, and she had grown very pale. As for myself I was filled with self-contempt, yet was desperately resolved to have my way.

I laughed to dispel her fears, and saw that my manner and that false laugh alarmed her. She looked at me steadily, and pushed back the hair that the persistent wind tumbled into her eyes. Then she stared at the tug.

Digitized by Google

"Kitty," I said, using the tone of endearment, "all I ask is that for a little while you will trust me. I know just what I am doing; I am not crazy, nor in danger of it. But I don't intend that tug shall overhaul the *Idler*, if I can help it."

Benson had joined Miss Hansborough, for which I thanked him, and was saying something to her in low tones. The captain had gone away, to jangle signals to the engine room. The yacht's funnel began to pour out a cloud of smoke as dense as that from the tug, and she was already increasing her speed.

I studied the face of Mrs. Randolph while she looked at the tug. It was troubled and uncertain. At length she turned to me.

"If only I understood the situation better?"

"It is Courtney Lane," I confessed. "You saw the interview I gave to the *Mirror*. I know he has been swindling you, and I said as much in that interview. He understood it; and this is how he hits back. He sent an officer to the house while Jerome was there; it is his intention to have me thrown into a sanitarium as a madman, or placed under arrest as an impostor. I don't intend to give him the opportunity."

She clutched the rail with a spasmodic grip. I laid my hand gently on her shoulder; and a

Digitized by Google

flame of love and tenderness ran through me as I felt its warmth through the cool-looking blue linen and saw the rounded throat and the sudden heaving of her bosom.

"Julian, you are mistaken!" she said.

"Look at me!" I urged.

She looked — her blue eyes big and bright. The pallor was leaving her face and hectic spots glowed in her cheeks.

"Do I look like a madman? I am as sane as you are; as sane as Miss Hansborough, or Jack Benson. I know what I know. It startles you, yet it is true. If that tug overhauls us you will know also that it is true. I can defeat Courtney Lane, and fully expect and intend to. But now I should be placed at such a disadvantage that my case might be rendered hopeless. I am not at present ready, and he is trying to take advantage of my unreadiness. A week from now, even to-morrow perhaps, I shall be ready for whatever he attempts; and then I shall defy him, and overwhelm him."

We were well down toward Staten Island, and were already beginning to feel the swell of the more open water beyond. The breeze had quickened and was cool and salt. The plunging yacht cut into the waves and threw up a spray that glittered in the light of the dying sun.

Digitized by Google

I studied the face of the woman who stood troubled and perplexed beside me. She steadied herself, clinging to the rail as the *Idler* rolled under us, and returned my look with as much composure as she could command.

"I think you must be mistaken, Julian," she insisted, with pathetic gentleness. "That tug may not be following us at all; but if it is it must be because of some customs regulation we have violated. Still, if you do not wish it to overhaul us it is not for me to say that it shall."

As she looked again at the tug she saw a rocket signal.

"I think I will speak to the captain."

"I have no objection to that," I said, "but I have already told him we are not to lie to for the tug, and that it is not to be permitted to approach us. He is obeying my orders."

I pointed to the vomiting smoke of our funnel, which lay now in a thick smudge behind us on the water.

"I think I'd like to speak with him," she urged.

He was at the port rail aft; and leaving me abruptly she went toward him, the wind whipping her blue skirts about her and tugging at her hair.

Digitized by Google

Having talked with the captain, while I watched them furtively and at the same time watched the tug, she came back, struggling against the breeze.

"It is all right, Julian. The captain is not sure the tug is following us, or that those signals were for us, though he thought so at first. At any rate, we are going to ignore it and keep right on. Does that please you, my frightened boy?"

Wan as her smile was it made her cheeks dimple. She still carried in her right hand her yachting cap; with her left she held her fluttering skirts. Her tumbled hair was blown into her eyes, a bewitching net that enmeshed my heart. Her laugh rippled out with something of recklessness, as she added:

"It's just like the things one reads about; only such things always occurred ever so many years ago. A gallant vessel flying along, the waves rolling, night coming down, and behind, a low, black demon of a vessel in pursuit. But it ought to be sails, instead of steam; and a long, rakish, piratical craft with tapering masts, and half-naked sailors, with knives in their mouths, pulling at the ropes. I think that must be Treasure Island over there, don't you?"

Digitized by Google

"Kitty," I cried, "you are an angel!"

"Just a silly girl, that loves her husband," she answered.

"Even if he is a fool!"

"Whatever he is, Julian."

"You think I'm frightened, of course?"

"I'm not thinking; I'm trying to imagine how it feels to be chased by pirates."

"It pumps the blood through one's veins!"

"Aye, Sir Commander, it does; I feel mine tingling."

I was too anxious to laugh with her.

The captain came up to us.

"A good bit of wind," he said.

"A capful, you mean, Captain," Mrs. Randolph corrected, determined to be gay.

Quinby laughed.

"Aye, aye; a capful!"

"We're holding our own with the tug, Captain?" I asked.

"She's not gaining any now, and we're gathering speed. We can show her a clean pair of heels if we want to."

"We have chosen to want to, Captain. If they're really trying to overhaul us it is an impertinence."

"Very true, sir," he said; but his tone was noncommittal.

Digitized by Google

We stood together, watching the tug, the white-capped waves, the vessels here and there, with glances seaward. Jack Benson and Miss Hansborough had strolled round until they were together by the lashed automobile. Benson was leaning against the white canvas; and Miss Hansborough's white dress seemed to melt into that white canvas and become a part of it. They, too, were watching the tug, and talking about it.

"You are doing well, Captain Quinby," I said, as he started to move away.

"The best I can, sir."

The tug was falling behind. Powerful as she was, the *Idler* was the better racing machine. It seemed to me the yacht was going through the water now like a torpedo boat. The roughening sea and the speed with which she sheared into the waves soon sent a drenching spray over the bows, wetting the canvased auto-car and driving Miss Hansborough and Jack Benson from their position. They came back to where we stood, laughing, Miss Hansborough clutching her white skirts, with Benson holding to his hat and steadying her now and then as the yacht dipped and rolled.

"This is great!" he cried, clinging to her arm.

"Yes?" I said, with a meaning glance at his hand.

Digitized by Google

He flushed, and the nut-brown maid looked conscious.

"I mean the speed at which we're going," I corrected.

"The *Idler* ought to be entered for some of the international races," he said. "She'd make some of those boats look like thirty cents."

"We're dropping the tug fast," said Miss Hansborough.

Dense banks of clouds had descended in the west, apparently conjured there by the smoke from the tug. They were wrapping the tug now, and seemed part of the smudge that fussy little craft had created. The lights, the islands, even the near-by vessels, were being lost in the darkness of those clouds and in the coming night.

The darkness thickened, and the tug could no longer be seen. Night was at hand. The wind was brisker; the sea rougher; and a flood of water came tumbling and hissing at intervals over the bows. The cover of the autocar dripped with brine. Everything forward seemed half afloat. And still we fled, plunging, lifting, staggering on, at racing speed.

"I think it would be wise to go below," I said to Mrs. Randolph.

I had seen her shiver in the chill of the night air.

Digitized by Google

"You don't intend to keep up this speed long?" she asked, anxiously.

I beckoned to the captain.

"Captain," I said, "you may let up a bit on this; the tug is out of sight, and there is no longer need of such speed."

"Yes, sir!" he said; then added: "but it's been a pretty race."

He walked away, and the engines were put at a slower pace.

But the seas still came tumbling in on the forward deck and raced in lines of hissing white past the rail, while the milky wake lengthened back into the increasing darkness like a blurred white highway.

"Come, Margaret," said Mrs. Randolph, "we'll be nothing but mermaids if we stay here. You will come too, Jack?"

We walked from the rail together; but I stopped at the companion-way. with a make-believe afterthought.

"I'll be with you in a minute, after I've had a word with Captain Quinby."

"I'm going to show our lights now," said Quinby, as I joined him. "We might be into something before we know it."

"Very true," I admitted. "Which way are we heading?"

Digitized by Google

"Nor'east by east."

"We shall not go to Newport at present, Captain," I remarked.

"No?" he said, astonished. "Mrs. Randolph told me we were to go to Newport, by the sea route."

"Captain," I said, "I have my own good and sufficient reasons for whatever I do, peculiar though they may seem to you. The men who followed me in that tug doubtless know that we are going to Newport. They will look for me there; but I'll fool them. Why they are seeking me is neither here nor there; sufficient to say, I've done nothing criminal. You recognize me as the owner and commander of this yacht?"

"Certainly, sir."

He lifted his white, gold-braided cap.

"Then steam farther out to sea than would be necessary if we were going only to Newport. Keep out of the Sound altogether. We're going round Martha's Vineyard and beyond Boston Light at least. Just where we're to make our landing I haven't settled yet in my own mind. I'll talk with Mrs. Randolph about it first. But we are not going to Newport this trip."

I really wanted to head the *Idler* to the southward, in search of southern waters, knowing I

Digitized by Google

should not be looked for in that direction, but I was hardly ready for that yet. I felt that I might do it before morning.

When I went below I found that dinner was being prepared. Mrs. Randolph and her sister were in their staterooms. I had entirely forgotten that man lives by bread; I had dined and supped to the full of excitement, and felt the need of nothing else. Benson was curled lazily in a steamer chair. Miss Hansborough had been more gracious, and as a consequence for him the skies were again blue and the birds of love singing. If he could have forgotten Harvard he would have been quite happy and contented.

"I'll take the train for Cambridge as soon as we hit Newport," he said. "Maybe I can even yet patch up that matter and stay on the team."

"If you shouldn't be able to take that train?" I asked, as I dropped into a chair beside him.

He sat up straighter and gave me a sharp look.

"Oh, I was only joking," I said, "to see how you would take it!"

"By George," he exclaimed, "you gave me a start! You're going to run to Newport?"

"Oh, yes, we'll go to Newport, all right."

Digitized by Google

I did not say when.

Jerome came to me, immaculate, soft-footed, soft-voiced.

"Everything is ready, sir," he announced, and his eyes searched my face.

I went with him, to prepare for dinner. I was willing to go, for I wanted time to think. My head was filled with plans and felt as hot as an overworked auto-axle.

By the time dinner was served the yacht was not pitching so much. Captain Quinby dined with us, and that made it easier for me, for the conversation was repressed along certain lines because of his presence.

He was a broad-shouldered fellow of the rather jovial type, and had an Irish face. He told stories with much gusto — yachting stories chiefly, for he had been in command of a number of yachts. He took pride, too, in the deftness with which he could break an egg; and I recall that he said the braid on his cap was useful, to keep him from being thought merely one of the crew, and his suggestion that something of the kind ought to be designed for a gentleman's evening dress to keep him from being mistaken for one of the waiters. He laughed with much good humor, and at times showed a nimble Irish wit. And he had sense

Digitized by Google

and discretion; not once did he refer to the thing that was in the mind of each of us.

After dinner I again went on deck, excusing myself to Mrs. Randolph.

"Nothing more of that confounded tug?" I asked of the captain.

"Oh, no, sir!" with confidence. "I don't doubt she is crawling back to New York City long ago."

"Then, of course, she can't pick us up in the morning?"

"Not a chance of it, sir."

I studied the sky, but I was no mariner. Off on the port bow the green and red lights of a vessel dipped and winked, and on the starboard quarter there were rows of shining lights, which I had observed as soon as I came on deck.

"One of the European mail steamers," he said. "She's moving along."

I went below again. Mrs. Randolph, resolved to show no uneasiness over my seeming eccentricities, had seated herself in the little cabin at a table, with Benson and her sister, and had cards in her hands.

"We're just waiting for you," she said.

I was not pleased; yet play would eat up some of the time that threatened to hang with unpleasant and even dangerous superfluousness on my hands.

Digitized by Google

It was midnight when I went on deck again. The captain was still there, and I engaged him in conversation. For an hour we talked and smoked, burning my best cigars.

"If not Newport, where?" he asked at last.

"This is a yacht, Captain, and a yacht is a pleasure boat. We will roam about, and go to Newport by and by. Just now think of Highland Light, off Truro, on the Cape, as your destination. When we get there I'll give you further orders."

"Sealed orders, sir, or near that."

He laughed as if amused.

"You've had the like before?"

"Oh, yes, sir; more than once. I've changed courses as much as half a dozen times in a single day."

"I suppose the owner was drunk at the time?"

He laughed again, and threw the stub of his cigar over the rail.

"I didn't say so, sir."

I talked to the captain as long as I could find anything to say. And when there seemed no more to talk about I strolled the deck, watching the yeasty waves hiss past the rail in the darkness.

Digitized by Google

XV

"WAS EVER WOMAN IN THIS HUMOUR WOOED?"

IT was very late when I went below. The cabin was deserted by all save Mrs. Randolph, who was apparently awaiting my return. I wondered if she had not come up the companion-way more than once to ascertain what was detaining me. She sat by the table and had been trying to kill time with solitaire. She had the cards spread out in little piles, but swept them into a heap when she saw me.

Garbed in white, as her sister had been, she arose as I entered. She must have understood the impression that dress and feminine charms make on a man and counted on it in the interview she was seeking. Yet at the moment there was no thought in my mind that the witchery of dress and the sweet brightness she had assumed were so intended. I saw but her beauty. And as I thus beheld her I longed to take her in my arms and tell her how I loved her, and that all my mysterious actions were based on that love. I had delayed on deck that I might not see her again that night; but now my heart

Digitized by Google

so went out to her that it pleased me to know she had waited and that I had not missed seeing her. Yet I hesitated.

"Julian," she said when I took the chair near her, "you were talking of Courtney Lane?"

The electric lamp shedding its white light on her face revealed its hidden anxiety.

"This is romantic," I evaded; "out on the rolling deep, with a staunch yacht under us, a reliable captain and crew, and the wind and waves flying. I think I should like to cross the Atlantic in this way."

"We may again some time," she said, trying to meet my pretended jocund spirit in the same mood.

"When was it we went to the Mediterranean in the *Idler?*" I asked, trifling with the cards.

"Four years ago—shortly after our marriage."

How strange that sounded! She had married Julian Randolph four years ago. And she looked not more than twenty.

"And we had a perfectly splendid time!" she added.

She leaned toward me, her blue eyes shining, her lips parted, a spot of red in each cheek.

"Oh, Julian! Julian!"

Remorse cut me like a knife.

"Be a man!" my manhood whispered.

Digitized by Google

"Play your part to the end," advised my fears.

I thought I knew what was in her heart; and that wild longing to take her in my arms and claim her for my very own almost overpowered me.

My fingers trembled as I felt in my pockets for that letter from Asbury Rand which had startled me in the house on Fifth Avenue. She was watching me, her attitude expectant, eager, as we sat there — we two alone together. She divined for what I was searching.

"If you don't desire to talk about it, Julian?" she said, with gracious comprehension of my trembling hesitation.

"My God," I burst out, "I've got to talk about it!"

I felt that she needed a better understanding of the groundwork of my fears.

"Here is that letter," I said, giving it to her. "I have known for some time that Courtney Lane is my deadly enemy; that he distrusts me, and intends to crush me. So I took steps to cripple his efforts all I could. But I didn't know he was so desperate — didn't dream of it; this letter will show you how desperate he is. It was sent to me by a detective whom I employed to look up his misdoings."

Digitized by Google

"You employed a detective?"

She clutched the letter and took in its contents at a glance.

"I employed a detective to shadow Lane," I said defiantly. "He discovered the fact, or else became frightened by that interview in the *Mirror;* and, as you see there, he purposes to have me examined by alienists and declared insane, that I may not be able to thwart him in the financial raids he is making on you, under cover of serving you."

She ignored this; it was not as new as it had been a few hours before.

"You do not believe what that letter says?"

"I believe everything in it," I answered. "Lane pretends to think that I am either an impostor or a lunatic, and perhaps a good deal of both."

"You should have shown me this at the house," she urged.

"Could you have stopped him?"

"I'm sure I could. He is very silly, if he has undertaken a thing of this kind."

"He has not only undertaken it, but he means to carry it through," I assured her. "I hope you will begin to understand the infamy of that man. He has been robbing you boldly. He knows that I know it; and the only thing he can

Digitized by Google

think of to keep me from exposing him is some such desperate game as this."

"I — I think you must be mistaken!"

But her lips trembled, and her face was again white.

"Mrs. Randolph," I said, and I know my voice shook, "will you let me make a confession to you?"

"Say anything you please, Julian."

"I must tell you the truth again," I cried huskily; "for the lies I repeat over and over and the lie I am living choke me. I am horrified, when I think of it; and I seem to think of it all the time."

She laid her hand on my arm.

"Julian," she said earnestly, "don't you think I understand the situation?"

"Yes, but I must tell you!" I declared. "I must tell you again, for you seem not to have believed me, or comprehended. I did meet Lane that time in Philadelphia. He has secured the proofs of it, and of the fact that I taught in a school there. He believes, knows, that I am not Julian Randolph."

Her fingers tightened in a sharp clutch on my arm.

"You hear what I say?" I asked.

"Yes, Julian."

Digitized by Google

The very calmness and quietness of the answer startled me.

I dropped to her feet, in an agony of love and remorse.

"Mrs. Randolph," I said, "when I met you in that strange way I loved you as soon as I saw you; and I love you a thousand times more now than I did then. I did not believe such love was possible. To think that I may now lose you fills me with a continual terror. And yet I am going to confess fully my imposture, even though it sends me from you forever."

She bent over me and put her arms round my neck. I do not know how it happened; but the next moment she was weeping in my arms, and I was kissing her hair with rapturous, feverish kisses. I drew her to me, passionately, insanely; I felt that I could not let her go.

"Mrs. Randolph," I said, "I have been from the first a base liar and hypocrite. I took advantage of your belief in my identity as your husband. Would to God I were your husband! But I am not. I am only a miserable fraud and pretender. You would not believe this at first, and my great love for you then caused me to become so weak and villanous that I stopped trying to make you see the truth. But I can go no farther."

Digitized by Google

I poured out my confession in that wild way. I told her of my suspicions against Courtney Lane and how they were aroused; of how I had resolved to thwart and ruin him, for her sake; of how when that was done I had meant to confess everything to her and leave her forever; and of the feeling that had grown in me and become stronger than my own life that I could not leave her, because I loved her with a power which I could not subdue.

"I knew you would scorn and hate me; you scorn and hate me now?" I raved.

She clung to me, weeping like a child.

"You don't believe what I have told you?" I cried.

"If you want me to, I will believe all of it."

"You must believe that I love you! Oh, my God, how I love you! It will kill me to lose you."

I pressed her to my heart and lavished kisses on her. She did not draw away.

"Though I am not your husband, I may hope to become your husband?"

"Yes, if you wish it, Julian."

Julian! Great Heavens! Even yet she did not believe me. I released her from my arms.

"I wish it," I avowed. "No man ever wished

Digitized by Google

anything more. You will not change when you find that all I have told you is true?"

She smoothed back her hair, rumpled by my caresses. She was breathless.

"What a lover you are! See what a tangle my hair is in."

She tried to straighten it out, taking the chair she had occupied. I took the other, and looked at her, my hungry love unsatisfied, marvelling at this woman's belief in me.

"See!" she said. "You've snarled it so that I shall have to braid it."

She shook the shining coils down her back. They were loose and fluffy, and the light brightened them; they were a very glory against the white of her dress. When she set her slender fingers at work the flying strands became rayonnant.

"You will believe me," I said, "when I prove to you that Courtney Lane is a deep-dyed villain?"

"It will be hard to believe. He has probably made mistakes; he isn't perfection. If he got out those papers against you and chased us in that tug he certainly made a very great mistake."

"You will believe what I say of him if I prove it?"

Digitized by Google

"I shall have to."

"And these other things, if I prove them?"

"I shall have to, then, of course."

She did not believe them now, however. She wrinkled her brows in perplexity; in her azure eyes rested a cloud of some kind.

"The important thing is that I love you," I said; "that is all I know now. I hope I don't need to prove that; and I shall want to know nothing else forever than that you love me. I intend to prove myself the man you love, even if not the man you suppose me to be. You have loved the memory of your husband. I shall be to you your husband reincarnated."

"It would be the strangest thing in the world."

Her fingers were flying in her shining braids, her blue eyes were fixed on my flushed face. What she saw there I do not know; other than that I am sure she did not fail to see the overmastering love that had swept me on.

"Kitty," I said, "I will be the best and the most loving husband it is possible for me to be — for any man to be. I shall live just to love you and make you happy. You love me now, as another man; you shall love me for myself alone, and as your husband. You have given me life again. I feared you would spurn me.

Digitized by Google

But you will not spurn me ever, even if I have played the hypocrite?"

"Of course not," was her answer, her brows still perplexed and her eyes shadowed.

"And you will become my wife?"

"If I am not your wife now, I am ready to become your wife at any time."

"Was ever woman in this humour wooed?
Was ever woman in this humour won?"

Digitized by Google

XVI

THE OFFICER FROM NEW YORK

"YORK HARBOR, Captain," I said to Captain Quinby, when he came to me for further instructions.

"York Harbor it is," he answered, "and a pleasant place. I've been there a number of times."

Obeying my orders, he kept the yacht well out at sea, to avoid being spoken by passing vessels, and went on toward York Harbor. My inclinations made me wish to cruise idly about, without touching at any port, until our supply of coal was nearly gone; but I was anxious to get in telegraphic communication with Asbury Rand, whom I pictured as industriously digging up for me the evidence with which I should overwhelm and crush Courtney Lane.

On this point I grew so anxious that I had the captain put in at Bryant's Cove, on the Massachusetts coast, and I sent a boat ashore with an urgent telegram. Mrs. Randolph sent a message to Lane, which she showed me, tell-

Digitized by Google

ing him if he had taken any such steps against me as I thought he must desist at once.

Jack Benson was at first very anxious to be put ashore here, but I think he must have had a further talk with Miss Hansborough or Mrs. Randolph, for after some half-suppressed fuming he merely sent an explanatory message to his captain. I was too engrossed in my own affairs to give much heed to this at the time.

As for Mrs. Randolph and her sister, they had apparently come to some mutual understanding about me; for when I urged York Harbor instead of Newport, neither offered the slightest objection. They really seemed (for my benefit I felt sure) to prefer York Harbor just then to any other place on earth.

So the *Idler* (now deserving its name) idled along. I wanted to give Asbury Rand time not only to get my telegram, but to "do things," if he had not already done them. The orders I had sent him were peremptory; chief of them was an instruction to arrest Courtney Lane at once, if he had secured or could secure a scintilla of evidence against him.

Voyaging lazily, on lazy summer seas, is about the most delightful mode of existence imaginable, if one can have ease of mind. The skies were blue, the seas blue, and the eyes of my

Digitized by Google

love were as blue as the seas or the sky. In spite of depressing anxiety, love sailed with us. The clouds became fleecy and the winds slept. The *Idler* was almost like "a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

The sun was descending in red cloud banks, as we steamed slowly through the narrow channel into the little bay at York Harbor and cast anchor before the town. We floated the pennant of the New York Yacht Club.

Hardly was the anchor down when a boat put out from the wharf and came bobbing toward us. Jerome touched my elbow.

"There's that New York officer, sir!"

His voice thrilled with the tremendous import of his discovery. He was right; it was the New York officer. We crowded to the rail, watching the boat as it came dancing toward us across the sparkling waves. Mrs. Randolph was in blue linen, Miss Hansborough in the white dress that so became her.

Turning my back on the little company by the rail I ran below and into my stateroom. There I secured the revolver I had brought from the house on Fifth Avenue. It had been Julian Randolph's. I had appropriated it, and the cartridges I found with it, for an emergency, as I had appropriated all his other belongings.

Digitized by Google

The boat was almost alongside when I regained the deck and again stood with Mrs. Randolph and her companions. All were looking down into the boat.

The man in the stern-sheets stood up now. He was middle-aged, moustached, severe-looking, and he wore a suit of coarse plaids. A big watch chain cabled his waistcoat, and I saw the shine of a seal ring as he put up his hand to lift his derby hat.

"Is this yacht the *Idler?*" he asked; a superfluous question, for the name was visible on the starboard bow which he had passed, and he must have seen it.

"It is," said Benson, staring an inquiry.

"Then, will you be kind enough to tell me if Mr. Julian Randolph is on board?"

"He is not," I responded, with a promptness that kept any one else from answering.

"I mean a man answering to the name of Julian Randolph?" he amended, and began to feel in an inside pocket of his plaid coat.

"What is it you wish of him?" Mrs. Randolph asked.

I could see that both Benson and the captain were startled, and that even the nut-brown maid had lost her customary *sang-froid*.

The man stopped his pocket fumbling and

Digitized by Google

looked Mrs. Randolph straight in the face, for the moment ignoring the rest of us. The boat was bumping against the yacht, and one of the boatmen had put up an oar to push it off.

"I have evidence, Madam," was the respectful answer, with another touch of his derby hat, "that the man who has been posing as Julian Randolph, and by many is believed to be Julian Randolph, is on this yacht. I don't want to make trouble. My name is Jepson; I am a police officer, from New York, and have instructions to arrest and hold this man for examination. I am acting in conjunction with the police officers here."

He waved his hand toward a man who sat in the boat.

As no one answered immediately — through amazement on the part of Mrs. Randolph and her sister, Benson and the captain — Jepson went on, explaining:

"It was thought your yacht would put in at Newport; but she was sighted farther north, and a wireless was sent; it was believed she was coming here. Then I received my instructions."

He brought his written authority out with a jerk. The boatman had given a sudden push against the side of the yacht with his oar, to

Digitized by Google

keep the bumping boat off, and Jepson came near going into the water. He righted himself, and stood up, red-faced and threatening.

"If he is on board, it is my duty to arrest him!"

"He is not on board," said Mrs. Randolph quietly.

Jepson's red face looked indignant disbelief.

"Are you quite sure of that, Madam?" he asked sharply. "He was on her when she sailed from New York, and you have stopped nowhere but at Bryant's Cove, where the boat took only messages ashore. He is bound to be on this yacht, unless he jumped overboard."

"We threw him over, just off Highland Light," said Benson with reckless lightness of manner.

Jepson's red face grew redder. His derby, his moustache, even that suit of plaid, bristled indignation.

"Come!" he cried. "No foolishness! This ain't no joke. I'm commanded to get this man, and I want him." He looked straight at me. "I think that is the man right there."

Miss Hansborough leaned persuasively over the rail. She was cool again, and the only one there who was.

"If we tell you that the man you are looking

Digitized by Google

for isn't on the *Idler*, and hasn't been on the *Idler*, what then?" she asked.

"But he sailed on her from New York. And I know that's him, standing right there. I'm sure he's the guy I'm after, and I'll take the risks."

"Do you mean that you will drag me off this yacht on mere suspicion?" I flashed at him.

"Let me search the yacht. The man I'm after was on her."

"If you should find him, what would you do with him?" Miss Hansborough asked sweetly.

"Hold him, of course."

"Hold him where?"

"In jail, unless he furnished bail; men are coming on from New York to identify him, and they'll be here by the next train. If I made a mistake, the man could go; but if I wasn't mistaken he'd probably be held here, after examination, for extradition papers."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Miss Hansborough, still leaning over the rail. "It's too bad to have to disappoint you."

"Do you mean you ain't going to surrender him?"

"Why, of course, Silly, we'd surrender him if he were here; but he isn't here."

She pulled some petals from a flower she wore, put one carelessly between her lips and

Digitized by Google

as carelessly threw the others into the water. Her nerves were as steady as iron. I dared not look at Mrs. Randolph.

"Then I'll search the yacht!" Jepson bellowed.

"You may," said Miss Hansborough, "if you're not willing to accept our word. But you will not find him." She puckered her brows into a severe frown. "But let me remind you that in doing so you become a trespasser."

Jepson took hold of the rail and swung himself up, with a boost from the oarsman. He walked straight up to me.

"I think you're the man I want," he said.

"Better be sure of it," I warned. My hand was on the revolver in my pocket, though I had not made up my mind to use it.

"Here's the yacht before you," said Mrs. Randolph. "Look it over."

Jepson hesitated; he was confused, and his face was still a fiery red. He had the outraged air of a man who feels that he is being trifled with and badgered. After a moment he moved toward the companion-way.

"I'll go down and look round," he said, "but I think that's my man." He stopped. "I'd like to have some one go along, to give me the lay of things."

Digitized by Google

"To be sure," said Benson.

Jepson went below, accompanied by Jack Benson and Miss Hansborough. The captain drew off toward the after deck and looked at the sky. Forward some members of the crew were glancing in our direction; and two of the stokers, sweaty and grimy, who had come up for a breath of air, also looked our way.

"Julian," said Mrs. Randolph in an alarmed voice, "what shall we do?"

"Do? Nothing. I shall not go with that fellow, and if he tries to make me there will be trouble. I understand this thing. Lane is back of it, of course. I shall fight for my liberty, for a long enough time to enable me to put him behind the bars. Then I'm willing to surrender; for there will be nothing to surrender to, when he is out of the way."

She was troubled; her face held almost a frightened look.

"Come," I said, "don't worry! I don't intend to surrender to him."

"You could furnish a bond, you know, and—"

"What? Yield even that much? Suffer the ignominy of being placed under arrest at the instigation of Courtney Lane? No; I'll fight first."

"You are right," she assented; "I see you are right. Forgive me."

Digitized by Google

Jepson did not stay below long. When he came up, Benson and Miss Hansborough were with him. Benson's face was as red now as Jepson's, and both were as red as the setting sun. I saw that he and Jepson had been having words. The nut-brown maid was still calm. Benson came toward me quickly, getting in front of Jepson. His broad shoulders looked peculiarly aggressive. His eyes glittered. He tossed back his long hair angrily, with a heavy swing of his muscular hand. He seemed to expand vigorously, in his loose suit of gray flannel.

"He says he's going to take you," he almost shouted; "and if he tries it, and you don't want to go with him, there's going to be a first-class fight!"

Digitized by Google

XVII

UNDER THE JOLLY ROGER

JEPSON followed hard at Benson's heels. He stopped in front of me, ignoring the aggressive youth, eyed me sharply, and took out his folded paper. He began to read the document, which called for my detention.

There was a nervous silence all round, in which his harsh voice rose with singular clearness; a silence that made distinct the splashing of the waves against the hull of the yacht and the grinding and bumping of the boat against the planks.

One of the boatmen had climbed to the rail, and was hanging poised there, with one leg only on deck. Jerome stood close by the companion-way, his face pink and indignant. The captain had edged nearer, his hands thrust loosely into the pockets of his white coat; he was regarding the scene with frowning uneasiness.

"I must ask you to come with me," said Jepson, when he had finished reading. He slipped his coat open, displayed an official badge,

Digitized by Google

and lifted his voice. "I command you to surrender!" He glanced irresolutely at the boatman hanging over the rail, as if thinking of appealing to him for aid.

Mrs. Randolph broke the awkward pause that followed. She was outwardly as calm now as her sister, which must have cost her a great effort.

"Mr. Jepson," she said, "I think this farce has gone on long enough. This is our yacht. The man you are looking for is not here. We decline to be insulted further. There is your boat, and you will please us by getting into it."

"By George, we'll pitch you into it, if you don't go!" cried Benson. "We have had enough of you."

"I'll come again!" said Jepson, moving toward the rail. "I'm an officer of the law, and I'll come again. This is resisting an officer."

"If you show your nose on this deck, over you go, without any foolishness!" said Benson, following him.

"I'll get help, and come again," Jepson threatened.

The boatman went out of sight over the rail. Jepson gained the rail and sprang lightly down

Digitized by Google

into the boat. The captain, lighted cigar now in his teeth, sauntered toward us, and Jerome advanced from the head of the companion-way. The boat moved from the side of the *Idler*. The next moment it was being pulled shoreward.

Captain Quinby laughed as if the whole thing had amused him greatly.

"I was ready to put in an oar if I was wanted," he said.

"But he declared he would come back!" said Mrs. Randolph uneasily. "We must leave here at once."

"No," I said, "we are not going until I get some word from New York. I am not afraid of that scoundrel. If a man's house is his castle, so is his yacht; and we'll defend it, if we have to."

"We'll run up the Jolly Roger," said Benson, with an effervescence that could hardly have been real.

As soon as it was certain that Jepson would not return immediately we held a council of war in the cabin. I invited Captain Quinby to consult with us, but instructed him to station a lookout on deck, that we might not be surprised. And I asked Jerome to come in. I felt that I needed now all the force I could

Digitized by Google

muster. Four men, not to mention the crew, of whom I was not sure, would constitute no mean fighting force.

To all except Mrs. Randolph I was still posing as Julian Randolph. How much Miss Hansborough knew, or guessed, I could not tell. She was of course her sister's confidante. And lovers hold few secrets from each other. Hence it seemed probable that if Miss Hansborough had been enlightened, Benson had been, too. Whatever they knew, if anything, they concealed from the captain.

"In the first place," I said, opening our talk, "it is to be understood that if I surrender to this man it will be only when I am ready to do so. A trap has been set for me, and I do not intend to fall into it. I am expecting important news from New York; an answer to the telegram I sent from Bryant's Cove. As soon as I get it I intend to turn the tables on the man who is now trying to ruin me. When things have so shaped themselves that I know I shall be safe from him, I shall be ready to face whatever legal complications may come from our present action. But now, and until I have news from my agent in New York, I shall fight, before I surrender."

I stopped. Fuller explanations, and the men-

Digitized by Google

tion of the name of Courtney Lane, did not seem necessary.

"Will some one go ashore and find if there is a telegram for me?" I asked in the silence that followed.

"I will," said Benson, and there was fighting fire in his eyes; "I think I'd like to know what is being said and done there."

"I can go," Captain Quinby volunteered.

Mrs. Randolph lifted her eyes to mine.

"Perhaps I'd better go, Julian," she said, surprising me by the offer. "Margaret and I are the ones to go. The men should stay by the yacht. I don't think that officer will return; but if he should, with assistance, as he threatened, you may need all the force you have here."

The wharves were not far away, and I had been informed that the telegraph office was not distant from the wharves; so that it would have been easy to send Jerome, or even some member of the crew. But I saw that Mrs. Randolph wished to go.

The conference broke up at once; and Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough were taken ashore in the *Idler's* launch. Benson and I, the captain and Jerome, stood on deck, and watched them until after they landed. The

Digitized by Google

launch remained at the wharf, and Mrs. Randolph and her sister disappeared.

Though the fading sunlight still shone in flashes of fire in some of the upper windows of the houses of the town, the wharves and streets were being shadowed and the street lamps began to shine.

"I'm beginning to enjoy this," said Benson, walking the deck with me.

"You must have had some old berserker for an ancestor," was my comment.

"No; it's the excitement — something the way a fellow feels when a football game is on, or coming on. It makes me understand how our boys get desperate over in the Philippines, with fanatical Moros popping at them from the bush, and proceed to shoot a datto or two, to even things. I wanted to throw a chair at that officer, and had hard work not to do it."

Captain Quinby was beginning to enjoy it, too. He strolled up to where we stood talking.

"I heard what you said, about a man's yacht being his castle. That ought to be good law. It's good law with me, anyhow, aboard ship."

We killed time with talk, but the wait began to grow tedious. It had been late when we steamed into the harbor, and night was now at hand. Benson looked at the darkening town.

Digitized by Google

"I don't suppose anything can happen to them?" he remarked.

"Impossible," said the captain, "it's but a little distance to the telegraph office."

Some boats pulled off and rowed round the *Idler*, the occupants looking inquisitively at her and at the group on her deck. One, disreputable and impertinent, drew alongside and began to ask questions.

"We've got Captain Kidd aboard," said Benson, replying. "He's hunting along this coast for some of his old buried treasure."

"Ah, gwan! What ye givin' us?" was fired back.

"When a fool asks fool questions I give him a fool's answer," said Benson, in an amused voice.

The inquisitive occupants of the boat became offended, made indignant remarks, and rowed away.

Suddenly lights flashed on the wharf, and a large boat put out. It was not our launch. As it approached we saw that it carried Jepson and a number of men.

"They have come for me, and are going to fight; and they have detained the women, to keep them out of it," I said, as a guess. "They intend to take the yacht by force. If they try it!" — I drew my revolver — "they'll find that they have waked up the wrong passenger."

Digitized by Google

I was furiously angry and in a mood for fighting.

A sloop yacht near us had a light burning, which cast a red streak on the water.

"If they cross the line of light from that sloop I shall certainly fire into them," I added as the boat came on.

"Perhaps they only want to parley," said Quinby, in a tone which suggested that he thought me rash.

"Captain Quinby," I demanded in a spurt of wrath, "are you with me in this, or with the crowd in that boat?"

"With you, sir, of course," he said; yet he was not pleased with the manner of my address.

"Understand then," I announced, "that I shall resist arrest to the last gasp."

I looked at Benson.

"Jack," I cried, "I know you will back me in this? They have held Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough ashore, and now they intend to capture me."

Benson, who had risen and was staring at the boat, put his hand on the back of the steamer chair he had been occupying, thus seizing it for a weapon.

"We'll stand by you," he said.

Jerome picked up a billet of wood and came

Digitized by Google

forward, and ranged himself by my side. The captain advanced to the rail, with the air of a man who has determined to stick to his employer, right or wrong.

"I guess they're coming for you," he admitted, reluctantly.

There was a show of excitement among the members of the crew who were on deck, but I did not ask their aid.

As the boat carrying Jepson and his deputies drew near the red glare cast on the water by the light of the sloop yacht, I caught up a megaphone.

"If you cross the line of that light I shall fire on you!" I shouted through it.

The oars backed water instantly and there was confusion in the boat.

"We've come to demand your surrender!" Jepson bellowed.

"You demanded that before," I answered, "and I told you I refused to surrender to you. That is still my answer; and if you come any closer I shall open fire on your boat."

I held up the glittering revolver and clicked the cylinder round.

There was a hurried consultation in the boat. The confusion continued for a minute or more. Then the oars dropped into the water and the

Digitized by Google

boat advanced. As it came well within the light from the sloop yacht I could see the tense faces of the men and even the glitter of their eyes, so close were they.

"Halt!" I commanded, lifting the revolver.

The boat swung out into the centre of the forbidden line and came on.

"You think I'm bluffing," I cried. "This will show you!"

In that light, and being so near, the boat was a fair target. I swung the revolver down on it, and by good luck sent a bullet into the prow near the water line. When my revolver cracked, the boat stopped so suddenly that one man was almost spilled over the bow. A cry of excitement went up from the wharves. In the midst of the confusion I fired again, the bullet cutting into the water near the boat's bow.

Jepson shouted something, but if it was an order to go ahead it was not obeyed. I had frightened the crew; and they turned the boat about hastily, and began to row toward the shore with much hurried splashing of the oars.

Benson laughed, and even Captain Quinby seemed highly amused. I was still in deadly earnest, and I ejected the empty shells and replaced them with cartridges.

Digitized by Google

XVIII

DISQUIETING FEARS

THE crowd on the wharves increased as the boat neared the shore. Men were seen running wildly from the town, and the boatloads of curious people increased in number. But these curious folk kept well away from the *Idler*. My revolver shots and the retreat of Jepson had kicked up a tremendous excitement. On all the water craft about us people were now standing with eyes and glasses trained on our deck. Benson laughed in a manner to suggest that the strain on his nerves was beginning to tell.

"Since we have run up the Jolly Roger," he said, "why not load the little brass signal gun and give them a ripping salute with it if they come again?"

When darkness fell and Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough still delayed, their continued absence began to create real uneasiness.

A thin white mist lay now on the water. Through it the lights about us and the lights of the town shone dimly. We hung out our lan-

Digitized by Google

terns. And still the women did not appear. Quinby became as puzzled as we were, and, as his words showed, suspicious.

"Captain," I said at last, "Benson and I will take the small boat and go ashore."

"It may be a trap for you, sir," he warned. "Don't you think if an investigation is made I had better make it?"

But I was now too anxious and too much alarmed. Whatever risk there was I would take it. I imagined all sorts of impossible nonsense concerning things that might have befallen Mrs. Randolph. I thought chiefly of Mrs. Randolph; Benson's anxiety was for Miss Hansborough. Which shows that love is not only a singular, but a selfish, passion. Within the charmed and fairy ring which bounds it there is room for but two people; all the rest of the world must stand aloof.

The incoming tide was swinging the yacht around so that she now lay broadside to the wharf. When the boat was lowered, Benson and I climbed down into it silently and rowed a short distance seaward, so that if seen it would not be guessed that we were from the *Idler*. Then we turned, swinging in a large half-circle, and pulled toward the shore. Benson was capital with the oar. He explained his proficiency

Digitized by Google

by saying that he had practised one season in the Harvard freshman crew on the classic Charles.

We soon discovered that our danger was not excessive. There were other small boats out, and few of them carried lights. We came near bumping into one of them. Avoiding the small floating dock where our launch lay, we gained a black wharf not distant from it. The rising tide enabled us to climb readily out on this wharf, which we found slippery with the mist.

"Now for that telegraph office," I said.

But before we had gone far we were stopped by hearing voices. They were speaking of the *Idler:*

"He's goin' to bring a tug round from Portsmouth. They say that devil will fight, and it looks it; but Jepson's got a lot of sand, too, and he won't give up easy. He says he'll take him before morning."

Benson pressed my arm significantly. I drew him to one side, and we passed on unseen. But we had, it seemed, made a highly important discovery.

As we were about to enter the narrow street that leads from the wharves we again heard voices — the voices of men, and of Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough. I stopped stock

Digitized by Google

still, and Benson did the same. When the women came into view two men were with them, and as they passed between us and a wharf lamp I saw that one of the men was Courtney Lane. I know I trembled then, for Benson cautioned me.

"Steady, old man!" he said. "It looks peculiar, but of course it's all right."

Yes, of course it was — so far as Mrs. Randolph and her sister were concerned. But that Courtney Lane should even speak to Mrs. Randolph made my blood boil. And though I ought not to have been, I was astonished to find that he was in York Harbor. They passed on toward the launch while we stood uncertain of our proper course. I caught but two sentences clearly.

Mrs. Randolph:

"I still insist that you are wholly wrong and should have consulted me."

Courtney Lane:

"I used my best judgment. You will agree with me in that by and by."

We followed. At the moment nothing but a violent collision with Lane could have satisfied my burning indignation.

"I feel like a thief," said Benson. "Perhaps we'd better make our presence known?"

Digitized by Google

My hesitation lost us the chance to do that. Before I could make up my mind, the women were in the launch and it was moving off. Lane and his companion turned about, passed us in the darkness without seeing us, and went on toward the street.

"I'd like to follow Lane," I whispered.

"I think we'd better return at once to the yacht," said Benson.

He was cooler than I, as I had sense enough left to know. And I, too, was anxious to reach the yacht as soon as possible.

"All right," I assented.

We ran round to our boat, and were soon following in the wake of the launch toward the *Idler*.

"I feel queer about this," Benson flung at me over his shoulder as he dipped his oar.

He pulled a strong stroke. Even in the misty gloom I could admire the swing of his athletic body; and his oar went true, with a beautiful feather, which I was not always able to manage.

"The whole thing is queer," I said.

When we reached the *Idler* we were greeted from the half-darkness of the deck by Mrs. Randolph and her sister.

"Silly boy!" said Mrs. Randolph to me. "Were you afraid to trust us ashore?"

Digitized by Google

"Jack didn't try to run away to Cambridge, I hope?" said Miss Hansborough.

"I was anxious," I admitted.

Benson said not a word; and we climbed to the deck, where my first inquiry was for the expected telegram from Asbury Rand.

"That was one of the things we waited for," Mrs. Randolph explained, "when we found nothing there for you. We wired to him, and waited for an answer, but got nothing."

No telegram from Asbury Rand! I was bewildered. It seemed incredible.

"You met Courtney Lane," I said.

She did not answer; for Captain Quinby, who had gone to see to the proper hoisting of the boats, was approaching us.

"We've been having a great battle," I said, trying to assume a tone of jest as Quinby came within hearing. "The captain will bear me out in that. Jepson returned, with a rascally crew of deputies, and we came near blowing him out of the water. Jack has the signal gun double-shotted in case they come again."

"I only wanted to," said Benson, apologetically.

"It was lively and interesting while it lasted," Quinby acknowledged.

I moved with Mrs. Randolph toward the companion-way. The captain turned back

Digitized by Google

toward the boats. Jack Benson and Miss Hansborough walked together aft.

"Then Jepson really returned?" Mrs. Randolph said to me in a low voice. "What did he do?"

"He again demanded my surrender. I defied him, and fired on his boat."

"You didn't!" she gasped.

"I certainly did," I answered, "and he cleared out in a hurry. But from what Jack and I overheard on the wharf he has gone to Portsmouth to get a tug and intends to board the *Idler* in the darkness with a superior force. But forewarned is forearmed."

"We must leave here at once," she declared.

We descended into the cabin. She was anxious and agitated; when she began to remove her hat her fingers shook.

"We chanced to meet Mr. Lane and his lawyer at the telegraph office when we went to it the second time," she explained. "I had a long talk with him."

"I should like to get my fingers on his throat, the scoundrel!" I cried.

She looked me full in the face by the light of the electric lamp.

"He seemed quite sincere," she said. "He claimed to have proofs that you are an impostor and wanted to show them to me."

Digitized by Google

"And you?"

"I told him the thing was too silly to talk about."

"Then what?"

"He said he would yet convince me that he is right and that I am wrong. I told him to drop it. And I have revoked his power of attorney."

"Good!" I cried. "He didn't acknowledge, of course, that he has been swindling you?"

"Here are the telegrams I received, in answer to those I sent."

She took them from the pocket of the gray travelling cloak she had worn ashore.

"I wired a New York lawyer, and he advised me to consult some one here, which I did. And it was the lawyer here who drew for me the revocation of the power of attorney. So you see I have been busy, and that accounts for our long stay ashore."

"And then Lane came down to the wharf with you?"

"Yes. He urged that his intention was to act in my interest, because he believed I was being deceived by you. And then, as we were alone, he and his attorney accompanied us down to the launch."

"Kind of him, I'm sure!" I sneered.

"He tried to be gentlemanly about what he had done," she urged.

Digitized by Google

"And you think he will drop it now; will call off Jepson and go back to New York?"

She hesitated.

"I hope so. Yes, I think he will."

"I will fight him to the finish!" I cried.

I felt confused. My fingers ached to take him by the throat. Yet I could not shake off the unnerving conviction that no matter how great a villain he was I was a greater still; and I began to wonder how the whole thing would end. His influence over Mrs. Randolph was stronger than I liked. Nor could I understand the silence of my New York detective. If Lane had bribed him to drop the work I had assigned him I was placed at a decided disadvantage.

The telegrams she gave me I had glanced over as we talked, and had seen that to me they were unimportant.

Miss Hansborough appeared in the cabin doorway, with Jack Benson looking over her shoulder.

"May we come in, O plotters?" she asked.

Her cheeks were flushed and there was a shining light in her brown eyes. She was still wrapped in her dove-colored coat. It swung open as she came in, revealing its lining of shining silk of light blue. Benson looked both crushed and warlike, as he followed her in.

Digitized by Google

He seemed still ready to fight Jepson, but the nut-brown maid had evidently rebuked him for something.

"I hear you have been trying to get us all into jail," she said, speaking to me. "Suppose that while you were playing Alkali Ike you had killed some one?"

"They were the aggressors," was my reply. "I warned them."

"What will you do if they come in the tug from Portsmouth?"

"They'll have a jolly time getting aboard," said Benson, with bulldog grimness.

"We'll not be here when the tug comes, if it does come," said Mrs. Randolph. "We shall put to sea as soon as Jerome has taken some messages ashore. Jack, will you tell the captain that Jerome is to go ashore at once, and to have a boat ready?"

She went to the tiny writing desk, scribbled a message, and came back with a blank sheet and a pencil for me.

"Here is paper for your message to Rand," she said. "Margaret, summon Jerome."

She had assumed the guidance of affairs, and I was made to feel suddenly that all along she had merely permitted me to imagine that I was the ruling spirit.

Digitized by Google

XIX

MRS. RANDOLPH IN COMMAND

JEROME went ashore with the messages, mine a peppery and peremptory one to Rand. I hoped it would blister him into activity.

While we awaited Jerome's return we held another consultation in the cabin, Captain Quinby sitting with us.

"This reminds me," he said, "of the time I was captain of the yacht *Lothair*, in the Mediterranean, and an Algerian pirate who was mayor of the town, or something, tried to hold us up for a hundred pounds, claiming it was customs duties. He swore by the beard of the Prophet that if we didn't pay it he would have us all in jail before morning. We pitched the beggar into the sea, and while his crew was fishing him out we sailed away."

Mrs. Randolph was poring over a chart on the table.

"We will keep far enough out to make sure we miss the tug, if that man has been foolish enough to go for one," she said. "And then we will steer for Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

Digitized by Google

Here it is. The answers to our telegrams can be forwarded to that point."

She looked up from the chart.

"That will put us outside the jurisdiction of the United States, Captain, which is what we want just now. We will sail as soon as Jerome returns."

That some new rumors were afloat concerning us was shown by the appearance of a small fleet of rowboats in the wake of Jerome's, as he pulled off to the *Idler*. In one of them was a reporter, who wanted to come aboard and interview us. We refused. But for his benefit Benson picked up a conversation with a boat that bobbed its light like a drunken fire-fly under our bows.

"What's the news from Jepson?" he asked.

"Are you going to fight him?" was the answer.

"Sure thing!" said Benson. "Did you think we wouldn't? If you're harboring that idea under your hat just take a look at our brass cannon up here. She's loaded so full that she's got the asthma. What's Jepson doing?"

"Some say he's gone to Portsmouth to get a tug. But they're goin' to send another boat out from shore pretty soon."

"Oh, they are?" said Benson airily. "Just stand by, then, and see us blow that boat out of the water."

Digitized by Google

But at this juncture our anchor began to come in.

"Say, you ain't goin' to sail now?" arose from the boat in a wail of disappointment.

"We're off for Portsmouth, to meet Jepson," Benson declared. "We intend to sink that tug, and then come back here and fight any boat that is sent against us. We'll sink that tug as soon as we meet it."

Apparently Benson had irrevocably cast his lot in with mine, in spite of his anxiety over matters at Cambridge. My heart went out to him in a great wave of thankfulness.

We were not molested as we steamed out of the harbor. The boats drew away and gave us ample room. The channel to the sea is like the neck of a bottle, and the night was dark; but we passed out slowly, and without accident. And soon the lights of the town faded into the mist that was thickening over the water.

"Fair Harvard is the chief thing that worries me," Benson confessed, walking the deck with me. "I'll have to fabricate to beat the band, when I get back." He laughed without merriment. "Say, I'll claim that you held me aboard there in New York when the *Idler* sailed, and refused to land me afterward!"

"You might add something about the irre-

Digitized by Google

sistible power of a pair of brown eyes," I suggested.

But when I considered what he was doing for me, I added:

"Jack, don't think I fail to appreciate your kindness. You've made a tremendous sacrifice for me, and I know it, and shall not soon forget it."

I had slept very little the night before. This night I slept less, as we fled northward over the tumbling sea. We saw nothing of that tug from Portsmouth, and hardly a light after we left the lights of York Harbor behind us in the mist. Mrs. Randolph had directed the captain to run well out to sea before laying his course, and so we were out of sight of the lighthouses, even if the mist had not hidden them.

This mist made gray-gold halos round our lamps, and transformed Captain Quinby into a moving ghost as he walked the deck.

"I'd advise you to go below, Mr. Randolph," he said, when it was long past midnight. "It's a nasty night."

"I will, Captain," I answered, "as soon as I have smoked a cigar with you."

He gave me his, to serve as a light. The misty fog blew in our faces with a salty sting and made his oilskins shine. I drew my heavy coat closer about my shoulders.

Digitized by Google

"Along about this time of year you can generally cut the fog on this coast with a knife," he said. "I hope we don't go blundering into any of those Gloucester fishermen. When they're loaded they race along here from the Grand Banks for Boston as if they were after the America's cup."

"I want to thank you, Captain," I said, "for standing by me so manfully there in the harbor."

He laughed, shaking the water from his sou'wester.

"Mr. Randolph," he said, with an earnestness I could not mistake, "he would be a poor captain who wouldn't stand by the owner in a case like that."

I saw that his faith in me as Julian Randolph had not been shaken.

I continued to walk the deck even after I had smoked out that cigar, my thoughts on Mrs. Randolph. It vexed me that I had brought this trouble and annoyance to her. She was of a spirit so true and fine that she ought, I knew, to be kept from things like this. She was continually an uplifting and refining influence; like the pure air of a mountain top, stimulating, healing, refreshing, buoying. In spite of all, I had been another, and, I hoped, a better man, since I had known her.

Digitized by Google

My mind went back to the time when she had called to me from her carriage, and it followed her through all the events since that memorable meeting. Something new had come into my life then. It could be felt, but not defined. It had transformed me. What I had since done I had done for her. My situation was anomalous. Yet I persuaded myself that at bottom it was not base. Nothing could be base and breathe the air where she lived.

Yielding to these thoughts, I mused and dreamed dreams. I felt that I was battling for her even now as we fled across the misty seas. I was but retreating, that I might be able to deliver a stronger blow in her behalf when the time came for it. My desire was sincere to protect her and shield her.

I pictured her as asleep in her stateroom, perhaps dreaming of me; or if awake, thinking of me, as I was of her. Strange that it was so, she still believed me to be her husband, Julian Randolph! To change that belief and let her see me as I was, not her husband, but her devoted lover, and at the same time not to shatter the love she felt for me, was now my delicate task. That was of more importance than even the overthrow of Courtney Lane. All depended on it; my future happiness was

Digitized by Google

bound up in its accomplishment. I trembled when I thought of the difficulties which hedged that victory about. But no true lover despairs. There is no wall of difficulty he can not surmount, however high, or howsoever it bristles with foemen.

The pendulum of my hopes went forward and back — forward and back. At one moment I was sure that Mrs. Randolph's life and mine, having touched in so peculiar a way, were destined not to be severed, whatever befell. One moment I felt thus; and then with the difficulties so clearly before me I doubted, and was miserable. But ever her voice called to me, as on that day when it had called to me from her carriage, and her azure eyes beckoned to me as then. Where their light led I must follow.

Thus I walked the deck, the salt mist in my face, but unmindful of its sting. When at last I went below, at the captain's repeated urging, the cabin was deserted by all save Jerome, who, worn out with waiting for me, had fallen asleep, with his head on the little table.

Though I was on deck again at an early hour I found Captain Quinby there before me. The sun had risen, and the mist seemed breaking away.

"It will burn off in a little while," he announced.

Digitized by Google

As if to prove his words, the sun broke through the mist shortly, a globe of burning copper set in a frame of pearly gray.

At our late breakfast Mrs. Randolph announced a change in our plans.

"We're going to Camden," she said, "instead of to Yarmouth."

"Maine is United States territory, I believe," I answered, recalling her words of the night before to the captain.

"Very true. But Camden is a long distance from York Harbor. Mr. Lane will return to New York and drop his foolish attack; I am sure of that, since I have had time to think it over. For that reason Mr. Jepson will not come to Camden. We can be quite safe and quiet there for as long as we wish to stay. I've thought it all over, and I'm sure it is best for us to go there. It won't seem so much as if we had run away, for one thing."

She gave me a look of inquiry as she concluded. She wore the blue linen again, which I had thought so becoming. Her color was better than the evening before; or perhaps that was the effect of the blue linen and daylight. A man judges such things poorly. She was always beautiful, whatever she wore.

"He will never drop it," I declared, thinking

Digitized by Google

of Lane; "for he knows that unless he crushes me I shall crush him."

"But you are to drop your attack on him, also, and call off your New York detective," she surprised me by saying.

"You would pay him something to drop it?" I asked, ready to oppose this new plan.

"I didn't say that, Julian."

She frowned. Strange that a few lines drawn in a smooth brow and the gathering of threatening threads of disapproval at the corners of a pair of blue eyes should have such power to crush a man's rebellious spirit!

"I see objections to your plan," I urged weakly.

"Of course we can't tell just what we shall do, until after we reach Camden and get in communication with New York," she compromised, for my benefit I was sure. "But this fleeing like a wolf in the night isn't to my fancy."

"Fleeing like a dogfish, you mean," said Miss Hansborough.

So we turned to Camden, the spot where Julian Randolph, stumbling down to his boat in the darkness, had tumbled into the water and was drowned. I didn't like the thought of it. Of all places, Camden was the last I should have chosen to visit at this time. But Mrs.

Digitized by Google

Randolph had her hand on the wheel of affairs and was showing a spirit of imperious determination I had not known she possessed. But withal my passionate love was in no wise abated; I think I loved her better because of that quality of strength.

We crowded to the rail as we steamed into the little harbor of Camden-by-the-Sea. The fog was gone, the sun shone bright on the water, whitecaps tossed about us. The little town crescenting the harbor, Negro Island and its lighthouse at the entrance, with the mountains, Megunticook and Battie, dominating all, made a pretty picture.

I saw Miss Hansborough point out to Benson *The Poplars*. It shone white on the slopes of Mount Battie, to the right of the town, overlooking the harbor, and the bay and its distant blue islands. I asked Mrs. Randolph for the glasses she had been using, and scrutinized the big house with its double line of tall poplars shading the wide avenue that led up to it.

In that house, I had been told, Julian Randolph had lived with the woman who now stood beside me. From it he had gone that dark night to his death in the sea. Far off on the right, but not visible, was the Lincolnville beach, where his body had been found. I con-

Digitized by Google

fess it gave me a queer feeling, and one not pleasant. It emphasized my hypocrisy — gave to my duplicity a deeper shade. Nor could I get ease of conscience by reflecting that Mrs. Randolph knew. For she had persistently refused to accept my declaration that I was not her husband.

As I looked at that house, the startling thought of what it would mean if the real Julian Randolph should reappear there suddenly came to terrify me. Strangely enough I had not much considered that possibility. He might still be alive somewhere; he might have had some cause for leaving mysteriously, of which I had never heard and of which Mrs. Randolph herself had not known. She had never really believed him dead; and it was because of that lack of belief that she had accepted me as the man himself, returned to her. And he might return suddenly, to confront and confound me. Stranger things than that have happened — are happening every day. My hands trembled as I put down the glasses.

While we steamed slowly in, round Negro Island, Mrs. Randolph began to point out sights and views that, if I were Julian Randolph, ought to have been as familiar to me as to her. She persistently avoided mention of that death

Digitized by Google

tumble into the sea off those wharves. It was a singular situation.

There were a few small yachts near us, as our anchor plunged into the water and we swung round in the stream of the tide. Their occupants evinced curiosity, and a few people began to gather on shore to look at us, for the *Idler* was not only a beautiful yacht, but was really large and palatial compared with the others.

I watched the shore anxiously, half expecting to see Lane and Jepson there. When I did not I breathed more freely, and went ashore with Mrs. Randolph. We were accompanied by Miss Hansborough and Jack Benson, and by Jerome and Lizette.

Benson bade us good by now, and caught the first train out of Rockland for Boston.

The Poplars not being ready for occupancy, we were driven to the Bay View Hotel, where as soon as possible we got in telegraphic communication with New York and repeated some of the messages sent from York Harbor. I now succeeded in waking up my exasperating and dilatory detective.

"Been absent and sick. Will push matters.
ASBURY RAND."

Digitized by Google

I sent him a tropical reply, asking him why his office force had not gone right on with the work. No answer came to this. Mrs. Randolph was averse to my sending these telegrams.

Later I consulted a Camden lawyer, laid before him as much of the case as I thought he ought to know for his guidance, and engaged him in the event of need to defend me in the local courts. I found that he already knew all about me, or as much as the newspapers had told. They had guessed at a great many things; hence his information was more satisfactory to himself than reliable.

When the auto-car was landed and brought round to the hotel we went out to the cottage on the slopes of Mount Battie. It was a palatial summer house, with others of its kind near by.

The next day we were occupying it. A few servants had been brought on the *Idler*, some had been procured in the town, and still others were hurrying on from New York and Newport. The yacht swung at anchor in the harbor, and the automobile was installed in its garage. Jerome kept inquisitive people at bay, and Courtney Lane and Jepson had apparently disappeared from the face of the earth.

Digitized by Google

Yet I was ill at ease. I could not talk much with Captain Quinby, except in a general way, though I smoked many cigars with him and heard all of his best stories. Miss Hansborough was caught up in the golfing set and was out on the links most of the time. So, although I ought to have been happy, with an abundance of leisure to spend in the society of the loveliest woman I had ever known, I was a prey to wearing anxiety. I could not escape from that new fear which the thought of the possible return of the real Julian Randolph had brought me.

Sitting in the cool shade of the wide piazza facing the sea, while Mrs. Randolph read to me in her soothing voice and I smoked and lounged with attempted laziness, the afternoon sun brightening the bay and shining hot on the slopes of the mountains, a sudden fear would shake me at sight of a man turning into the avenue of poplars and coming on with quick steps toward the house. On one such occasion, so strong was the conviction that this man was Julian Randolph, that I actually jumped to my feet, dropping my cigar, which rolled slowly off the piazza into the grass and lay there emitting protesting smoke spirals.

And so I watched and waited, thinking of

Digitized by Google

Julian Randolph, and of Lane and Jepson, and expecting constantly a bolt out of the blue. As I remember the time, it had its delights, its deep joys, its moments of intoxicating rapture; but I knew that it could not last.

Digitized by Google

XX

A DECLARATION OF WAR

I HAD not been long in Camden-by-the-Sea before I discovered that I was inordinately fond of automobiling. Many thousands of men were discovering the same thing for themselves at the same time, and no doubt to all of them it was as delightful a discovery as it was to me. As soon as I had mastered the intricacies of the big machine I set the chauffeur aside, and drove forth alone, or with Mrs. Randolph or Jerome.

I began to learn, also, in those days, how pleasant a thing it is to be in the possession and enjoyment of wealth. True, I had for my very own but the scant two hundred dollars that had been in my pocket when I entered Mrs. Randolph's carriage in New York. I had used little of it. I desired to hoard it against a day of need. But I required no money. Mrs. Randolph's Purse of Fortunatus showered me with everything, without my asking. It provided the house, the automobile, the yacht, the servants, Jerome and the chauffeur; its re-

Digitized by Google

sources were unstinted and apparently unlimited. Money had been offered me several times; I had refused it, and tried to feel ease of conscience in my fancied Spartan virtue.

The freedom from financial care which money brings was thus impressed on my mind. I had lived a hard life in that school in Philadelphia, for the pay of an instructor there was small. I did not doubt that one of Mrs. Randolph's dresses, though they seemed so elegantly simple, if I may use the term, cost more than such an instructor received for a whole year of perplexing and wearing toil. Anxiety, lest illness come, or loss of position, and the money fail, together with the inability to get even a few dollars ahead of the grinding needs of the present,—it is that which eats the heart out of the toiler and the poor. As we steamed into Camden one of the stokers had come up for a breath of air, out of the hot stoke-hole where, while we fled over the seas, he had been laboring in a heat so great that the very color seemed to have been washed out of his face. He looked at the mountains, cool-topped before him. I fancied I knew the thought of his heart. Freedom from grinding toil! Such freedom money brings. I wonder less that men worship it than that they do not worship it more.

Digitized by Google

The love of ease and the things that money can supply so lavishly I found growing in me. The world is beautiful in Maine, in June. It was money (which might be mine if I willed) that enabled me to enjoy the glory of the sunset from the mountain top, and the surpassing beauty of the sea, with its circling gulls, its impurpled islands, and the flashing sails of the schooners, deep-laden with lumber from the mills of Bangor. It was money (and it might be mine if I willed) which placed at my disposal that auto-car in which I flashed over the mountain curves and along that charming, sea-girt highway called the Belfast Road.

And often when alone with these things weighing on me the temptation to accept the situation, to say irrevocably that I was Julian Randolph and none other, assailed me. By yielding I should gain wealth; above all, I should gain the most beautiful, the most charming, the most lovable of women for my wife. Sometimes the seductive thought intoxicated and almost unmanned me. Yet always something rose within me in protest. I could not do it. I did not believe I was better than other men; I believed I was worse; daily I anathematized my villany and the slothful desires that I felt were eating out my manhood and stifling my conscience.

Digitized by Google

Then came a startling awakening.

I had been out in the automobile on the Belfast Road, and was returning. The auto was running slowly; the road, skirting the bay, gives alluring views that change with each turn. Not far ahead, on the right, the summer cottages brightened the slopes of the mountain. My thoughts were with the blue islands, with the white sails limned against wave and sky, but principally with Mrs. Randolph. I had asked her to accompany me that afternoon, as I always did, but she had urged a headache and declined.

Thoughts of her were beginning to exclude all other thoughts, when I heard a familiar voice, as in challenge, and looking up I saw Courtney Lane. He stood before me in the road, and had hailed me. At sight of him my blood boiled and my mind became homicidal. The impulse was strong in me to dash over him, hurl him to the ground, pulverize him under the heavy wheels, and leave him a bleeding corpse in the highway.

"Get out of my way!" I shouted in a passion.

"Just a word with you!" he said, his hand raised.

"Get out of my way!" I shouted again. "You villain, I'll run you down if you don't get out of my way!"

Digitized by Google

He did not move, and I swerved the car to pass him. As I did so he struck the auto with a quick jump and before I could do anything to prevent he was in beside me.

"I want a talk with you, out here where we shall be unmolested," he said coolly, dropping into the seat.

His assurance was monumental. My hands were on the steering wheel, but my eyes glared at him. He was young, and strong and muscular as that jump showed. His steely blue eyes looked into mine. His business suit of brown and his brown derby hat were pearly with the gray powder of road dust.

"You can't frighten me," he said, and I thought his thin-moustached upper lip lifted in a sneer, or a snarl. "I'm resolved to have a talk with you. I've come all the way from New York for that purpose. If you won't talk with me here, you will talk with me in the town, or even before witnesses. You had better let me say here what I've got to say."

I sank back against the cushions, trembling with rage and weakness.

"Well, what is it?" I demanded.

"Don't you think the time has come for you to drop this?"

"Drop what?" I asked.

Digitized by Google

"What you're doing — this stupendous game of fraud, by which you are making Mrs. Randolph believe that you are her husband. I think you have hypnotized her, for it is inconceivable otherwise that she should think so for a minute. For you know that I know who you are. Why continue it?"

The big auto-car was zigzagging from side to side of the road, for my fingers were nerveless, and my eyes were fixed on his face rather than on the highway.

"You have no right to question me," I said, "as to what I do or don't do. I know you for a swindling villain, who to save himself from exposure has tried to have me arrested, and —"

"What's the use?" he said, and he threw out his hand in a protesting gesture. "You can't continue this game, and you ought to know it. I've got all the proofs against you I want, or need."

"Then why don't you use them?" I cried defiantly.

"I have delayed for the sake of Mrs. Randolph. That is the only reason. I went faster at York Harbor and in New York than I should have done. I recognized that, when she appealed to me, and dropped out of the game. But I'm back now, and in a position to

Digitized by Google

show up your duplicity in a way that will make the world stare. It rests with you whether I expose you and publicly pillory you or not. You pretend to care for Mrs. Randolph."

"Don't sully her name by speaking it!" I shouted at him, in suffocating rage.

"I think I have shown far more regard for her good name than you have. It will be assailed by every gossip, if you force me to give my knowledge of you to the world. I want to shield her from the publicity of that."

"Why are you so interested in Mrs. Randolph?" I flashed at him.

"I was employed by her to look after her business interests, and merely as a matter of friendship I think I should —"

"You are in love with her! You want to marry her!"

"She is a very charming woman," he said, smiling at my heat.

He caught my arm, for I was steering blindly.

"You'll be into that wall in a minute!"

I shook off his hand.

"Don't touch me!" I shouted. "I didn't invite you into this auto, and I won't listen to your nonsense."

"See here!" He lowered his voice. "Are you going to compel me to do this thing? I ask

Digitized by Google

you to think of Mrs. Randolph. You pretend that you care for her. I know that you are not her husband. Your resemblance to —"

"You never saw Julian Randolph!"

"No. And I do not see him now, when I look at you. Now there is a woman at the hotel down here; she is from Philadelphia, and from that school where you were an instructor. She is Mrs. Trencher. Ah! I see that you remember her!"

I remembered her. Mrs. Trencher was matron of that school.

"I have asked her to come here, to identify you. She will be able to see you in the streets, or somewhere, even if you refuse to see her, and she will know that you are Louis Armitage. It is my intention to introduce her to Mrs. Randolph and have her acquaint Mrs. Randolph with her discovery."

Against myself I felt a rush of sudden anger, realizing that my face had shown fear. Then that anger flamed out against Lane, and I denounced him with weak and foolish vehemence.

He leaned back against the cushions smiling, and as if to show his utter contempt of me he took out a box of cigarettes, coolly selected one, set it between his teeth, and lighted it.

"What do you say?" he asked, as the smoke drifted through his thin nostrils.

Digitized by Google

"That you're a scoundrel; that you're a —"

"But about this other matter? What do you say about that? Why not confess to Mrs. Randolph that you have deceived her? You can let yourself down as easily as possible. Then get out of the country, and permit her to make whatever explanations she sees fit. It's the sensible way. And it's the only safe way, for you."

"You are through?" I said, when he stopped. My voice trembled.

"Yes; I'm through, for the present."

He was insufferably cool.

"You have undertaken this thing —"

"To unmask a villain!" he interrupted, with biting emphasis.

"You have undertaken it because you discovered that I intended to expose you, and prosecute you for swindling my wife while professing to conduct her financial affairs."

"Your wife! That's good!" He took the cigarette from between his lips and looked at it incuriously. "Yes, that's good — fine. You would do for a hero of melodrama."

"No jesting," I said, angrily. "I mean what I say."

"And I beg you to believe that I mean what I say."

Digitized by Google

"I intend to put you in Sing Sing. When I start at that the world will understand how disinterested you are, no matter what you may profess or try to prove against me."

My words sounded bold enough, yet I had never felt my position to be so weak. He seemed to realize it, and laughed contemptuously.

"Your threats don't trouble me," he said. "I have conducted Mrs. Randolph's financial affairs just as if they were my own."

"I don't doubt it!" I cried. But he ignored the sarcasm.

"You don't intend to admit your iniquity?" he said.

"I have nothing to admit," I hurled back at him, "and I defy you!"

He made a gesture of disdain, with the cigarette held in his fingers.

Slowly as the auto-car had moved, we were in the street below *The Poplars*. He glanced up at the house and tossed the cigarette away.

"That's your final word, is it?" he asked.

"My final word is, that I defy you, and will put you through!" I declared. "And if you call at *The Poplars* to make trouble I'll have the servants throw you out."

"You won't go down to the hotel and see Mrs. Trencher?"

Digitized by Google

"Certainly not. Why should I? I don't know her."

"But she knows you!"

The automobile came to a stop.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours to think it over," he said, reluctant to drop it thus. His tone was conciliatory. "I ask you to come down to the Bay View and see Mrs. Trencher."

"Will you get out of this auto," I shouted, "or shall I throw you out?"

He began to get out with tantalizing slowness, when I started the car with a jerk, and he came near falling. He turned toward me, white-faced and panting, as I steered toward the avenue of poplars.

"That's all right," he said, an unpleasant light in his cold blue eyes. "If you want war you can have it."

Digitized by Google

XXI

THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE

THAT afternoon I told Mrs. Randolph of my encounter with Courtney Lane. She was surprised, for she had not known he had arrived in Camden.

"I shall have to see him," she said.

Miss Hansborough came into the room while we were talking. She wore a golfing suit of gray and had just returned from the links.

"That odious Mrs. Trencher is in town," she announced with a frown of displeasure. "I met her awhile ago, and of course I had to ask her to call."

They were acquainted with Mrs. Trencher! Mrs. Randolph was undisturbed by the announcement and by my quick scrutiny of her face.

"I knew she was here," she said serenely. "Julian has been telling me. He met Courtney Lane awhile ago. She and Mr. Lane are at the same hotel."

"Why is it that unpleasant people always appear when they are not wanted?" said Miss Hansborough indignantly.

Digitized by Google

"I suppose it's because, being never wanted, it is impossible for them to appear when they are wanted," was Mrs. Randolph's irrefutable reply.

"Where did you know Mrs. Trencher?" I asked her as soon as I found opportunity.

"In New York, two winters ago."

"She is not in society — not in your circle, I mean?"

"No; she was engaged in charity work, and Margaret and I were thrown in with her on a church commission. She was very presuming, and we didn't encourage her."

"It seems to me she is very presuming now."

That Mrs. Trencher was a very presuming woman she proved, when she came to me on the street, the next morning. I had sent Jerome ahead of me to the post office; and as he delayed unduly and I was anxious to see the mail I walked on into the town, guarding warily against a meeting with Courtney Lane. Mrs. Trencher had been lying in wait for me in a little periodical store more than two blocks from the post office, and popped out on me with disconcerting suddenness.

"I was just thinking of you," she said; and I did not doubt it.

She wrinkled her face in what she meant for

Digitized by Google

a honeyed smile. She was a little woman, middle-aged, alert, aggressive, and behind the glasses which she wore with a certain dignity her black eyes snapped. I recalled how she had bounced the boys of that school about when she was angry, and how at such times her black eyes opened until they showed circles of white. But the eyes were benevolent now, almost motherly.

"I've just been thinking of you," she repeated, "and saying to myself that if it wasn't so early in the day I'd call on you. You left Philadelphia so suddenly, you know, that I didn't get to have a talk with you before you went."

"Confound Jerome!" I thought, as I glanced along the street and failed to see him.

"I think I don't understand you," I said, giving her as blank a stare as I could.

"When you left the Gilbert Porter Institute, you know," she explained blandly.

"I fear, Madam, that I do not know what you mean," I declared. "I have not been in Philadelphia recently."

"What!"

She was so amazed that the exclamation was shocked out of her. Her eyes opened in the old way and began to shine.

Digitized by Google

"Do you pretend —"

"I pretend nothing, Madam!" I said, stiffly. "I am sure I don't know you. This must be an attempt at some confidence game."

I glanced along the street again. Thank Heavens, Jerome was in sight!

"Ah, there comes my valet!" I said, with too evident relief. "You will please excuse me, Madam, and permit me to wish you a very good morning."

I left her gasping, as I lifted my hat to her and hurried toward Jerome, who had a sheaf of letters in his hands. I took the letters and looked at the addresses. While doing it we passed Mrs. Trencher, who had not yet regained her ability to speak. But I caught the foreboding gleam of her black eyes.

That afternoon she called at *The Poplars* with Courtney Lane. I was out in the auto-car. Jerome told me about it as soon as I returned and ran the car into the garage. His white, English face showed that pinkish flush which I had noted whenever he was moved or excited — a flush that gave him, what he lacked, almost the "beef and brawn" color of your typical Englishman.

"That damned scoundrel from New York —" he began; "I beg your pardon, sir, I mean Mr.

Digitized by Google

Lane! He is in town, sir; and was up here this afternoon."

Jerome's manner was so explosive that had the subject and the circumstances not been so serious or so personal I could have laughed. He had the indignant air of a man who feels that he is being wrongfully used. I knew at once that I had made a mistake in leaving the house that day. Still, what had I to fear?

"He was received?" I said; and I appeared to take the matter quite calmly.

"Yes, sir. There was a woman with him; a little woman, with black, gimlet eyes, and dressed like a twisted fashion plate."

It was the best possible description of Mrs. Trencher.

"They remained long?"

"At least an hour, sir."

I began to get out of the automobile.

"What time was this, Jerome?"

"Soon after you left, sir." He hesitated, as if he feared he might be considered a tale-bearer. "And when they were gone Mrs. Randolph went down town."

Why he thought it worth while to speak of that was not apparent. Perhaps, like me, his anxieties were making him unduly suspicious. The only surprising thing to me was that

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Randolph should have received Courtney Lane.

When I left the garage Jerome was swearing softly to himself, apparently more uneasy than I was. Mrs. Randolph heard me enter the house, and appeared before me in the large hall, as I was about to mount the stairs. Her face was so white that it startled me; and when she spoke her voice was so strained and unnatural that it sounded like the voice of another. She was in a dark brown street dress and its color emphasized the corpse-like pallor of her face.

"I should like to see you a minute," she said.

She moved toward the door of the reception room. I followed, my heart knocking unpleasantly against my ribs. She stood by the door as I entered, and then she closed it ominously. What she intended to say was for my ears alone.

"Mr. Lane has been here with Mrs. Trencher, and I have been down to their hotel."

She stood before me, her blue eyes big and bright, her voice strange and hard.

"Yes?" I said, helplessly, wondering what was coming.

"I heard Mrs. Trencher's story, and I saw the proofs she has, particularly a group photograph taken a few weeks ago, she assured me.

Digitized by Google

That photograph shows you in a classroom with students. On the wall is a banner, 'The Gilbert Porter Institute.' Do you recall when that photograph was taken?"

Her changed manner filled me with terror. Her voice — that low, soft voice — had assumed knife-like qualities.

"I recall it," I admitted.

"You knew Mrs. Trencher, in that school?"

"Yes."

"Then —"

"I am afraid I do not understand you," I interrupted. "I have already confessed to you in effect that all those things are true; and I have told you that I am not your husband, not Julian Randolph, not —"

She swayed with weakness; but as I moved toward her she waved me back.

"Yet I believed — was sure — all along that you were my husband. I refused to think anything else. I shut my eyes against the possibility that you were not. For you are his—his living image. Yet I know now that I was deceived."

She stretched out her hand toward the door, as if to open it and bid me begone; but her hand paused and clutched at her heart.

I sprang to her side.

"Mrs. Randolph," I began.

Digitized by Google

"Don't! Don't!" she moaned, trying to push me away. "Don't — touch me!"

"But, Mrs. Randolph!"

"I don't wish you to speak to me again."

"But I will speak to you; you must hear me!"

I caught her hand — it trembled violently; I carried it to my lips.

"Mrs. Randolph," I cried, in a tremor of excitement, overwhelmed by her changed attitude, "I must speak to you; I must make myself clear. It is not my fault that you believed me Julian Randolph. You will bear witness to that. More than once I have declared to you —"

"But I — I thought —"

"I loved you!" I cried. "I loved you madly, insanely; I loved you from the hour in which I first met you. I was not your husband, but I resolved to become your husband. I have tried to conduct myself honorably, and —"

She drew back, trembling.

"Is this the conduct of an honorable man?"

"But I explained to you," I urged; "on the *Idler*, you will remember, and at other times, I explained everything to you. I told you this — that I was not your husband, but that I desired to become your husband. I declared my love; I —"

Digitized by Google

"Fool — fool that I have been!"

"Hear me, Mrs. Randolph, for the sake of the great love with which I love you. That love has made me —"

"True love does not make a man a villain!"

"But it may cause him to do things which —"

"Spare me!" she begged. "This — this is too painful." I saw tears in her eyes. "Spare me!"

"Mrs. Randolph!"

"You must not stay here another day, not another hour."

"But, Mrs. Randolph!" I chattered.

"You must go!"

"Mrs. Randolph, I can't leave you."

"You must go," she said, inexorably.

She was reeling with weakness. It was cruel, I saw, to continue my appeals.

"I will go," I said, "since you wish it. But I shall not leave you. I love you so much that it is impossible for me to leave you. I shall not trouble you, but I shall be near you. If you will see me some time I will contrive an opportunity. You will see me some time?"

"Go! Go!" she said. And now the tears streamed down her cheeks. "Oh, my God, I can't stand this!"

I opened the door blindly and dashed like

Digitized by Google

a madman from the room. I paused at the foot of the stairs, checking my wild impulse to rush out of the house. I was not even entitled to wear the clothing I had on! The thought caused me to hasten to the rooms I had grown accustomed to calling mine. There I began to change into the clothing I had worn when I first met Mrs. Randolph. As I made the hurried change, how villanous seemed the fact that I had donned and worn with placidity the clothing of Julian Randolph. I was not able to heap on myself sufficient obloquy.

As I tossed my clothing about, dragging it from closet and dresser drawers, I saw the shining revolver with which I had fired on Jepson's boat — Julian Randolph's revolver. It lay where I had placed it after our arrival here, and it was loaded. How like rhodomontade and cheapest fustian seemed now my talk to Jepson. I was but a tinsel hero after all. And now I had reached the end.

I stared at that revolver, where it beckoned me. Here was a quick exit! A pull of that trigger, a flash, and I should be out of it. For a moment I trembled under the force of that horrid temptation. Then I pushed the revolver further into the drawer, tucking it out of sight. No, I could not do that. It was a coward's

Digitized by Google

weapon; and its use in that manner would subject Mrs. Randolph to most unpleasant notoriety. She had already been the unwilling recipient of too much of that, poor woman!

Then I fled from the house, taking only the things I had brought with me. I did not even pen a parting note. What was the use? Yet I lingered a little in the big hall, hoping again to see her. No one appeared, not even a servant; and I let myself quietly out by the front door.

Jerome was in the garage, talking with the chauffeur; I heard their voices. If Jerome had been alone I might have spoken to him a word of farewell. I passed on down the avenue of poplars; and as I could not make up my mind to turn toward the town I walked quickly in the other direction, and was soon again in the Belfast Road.

Having no definite plan and nothing but chaos in my mind and inconceivable anguish in my heart, I strode along, without any objective point. The blue sea and the blue islands no longer allured me; I was blind to the beauty of the mountain views; the roadside flowers had lost their power to charm.

I walked until I was well-nigh exhausted. Yet when I sought to stop and rest I could not; I felt that I must be moving. But the wild

Digitized by Google

impulse that spurred me began to pass by and by. I had sought to hurry away, to what point did not matter. Now I began to see that I could not put distance between myself and the woman I loved.

So I turned round at last, and walked more slowly back toward the town. This, at a sharp turn of the road, brought in view an automobile which for some time I had heard. Violent rage seized me when I saw that of the two men in it one was Courtney Lane. Had he been following me? If so for what purpose? I stopped stock still in the road, so amazed and enraged was I.

The automobile, which had been merely dawdling, shot by me in a cloud of dust. When it had disappeared I plodded on. Yet once again I saw it, returning, behind me, as I entered the town. This act on the part of Courtney Lane had all the indices of an attempt to spy on my movements.

When I came into the street below *The Poplars* a feverish desire to see Mrs. Randolph again took such possession of me that I turned into the shaded avenue and went on up to the house. I stood in hesitation before the door a full minute; then rang the bell. The maid who answered my ring had been weeping, and she

Digitized by Google

stared at me in a way that was not pleasant. Perhaps her mistress had been weeping, I thought, over the downfall of her belief in me. I presume I might have passed on into the house without question; instead I asked for Mrs. Randolph.

"She is not in."

"Not in to me, you mean?" I said, with the peculiar sensation of having been struck a blow in the face.

"No; she is not in."

"Could I see Miss Hansborough then?" I asked.

"She is not in."

"I think I heard her voice as I came up the walk," I insisted.

"No; she is not in!"

I turned in a daze from the door, stumbled down the path into the poplar-lined avenue, and out into the street; then walked on toward the town. As I did so Courtney Lane and his companion whirled past me in their automobile, thus preceding me.

Digitized by Google

XXII

A HERO TO HIS MASTER

MY anxiety to see Mrs. Randolph was not abated. Nor did I intend to give up my fight against Lane. Yet courage and determination came back to me but slowly. After some aimless wanderings I went to a hotel, avoiding the one where Lane was stopping. There I passed a wretched night.

In the morning, as I walked toward the post office, I saw Lane parting company with a man who had just stepped aboard the trolley car. The man was Doctor Thompson. A swift suspicion rose in my mind and the sight caused me to halt. I was sure that Lane had brought him to Camden with Mrs. Trencher, and had used them both against me with Mrs. Randolph. Having apparently completed his work against me, the doctor was now on his way to Rockland, I was sure, to take the early train there for New York.

I avoided Lane as I went on. I could not trust myself to meet him face to face, and I did not wish a scene in the streets. When I re-

Digitized by Google

turned to the hotel I secluded myself, fearing I could do nothing while he was in town. Yet I sent another telegram to Asbury Rand, whose inactivity had exhausted my patience. I had spent a feverish and restless night, and was now weak and really ill.

Along in the afternoon, when I was on the point of setting out for *The Poplars*, being determined to see Mrs. Randolph again even if I had to get into the house by walking in past the servant, there was a rap on the door.

"Come in!" I said, feeling too tired to rise from my chair. I thought it was the bell-boy.

When the door opened, the oblong, white face of Jerome appeared.

"May I come in?" he said timidly.

I jumped to my feet.

"Certainly," I cried; "delighted to see you!"

He came in cautiously, without enthusiasm, and closed the door softly behind him.

"I have left my dress-suit case and the trunk down-stairs," he said, enigmatically.

He sat down in the chair I pointed out, passed his long white hand nervously across his smooth chin, and carefully drew up his trousers that the knife-like creases might not be taken out of them. He was always particular about the appearance of his clothing. I wanted to in-

Digitized by Google

quire concerning Mrs. Randolph and affairs at *The Poplars*, but his manner puzzled me into delay.

"I have resolved to stay with you, sir!" he declared, with an air of mild and resigned determination.

The generosity and kindness of the fellow fairly overwhelmed me.

"But, Jerome," I expostulated, "I can't afford to keep a valet now. You understand what has happened, I see. And you must know that I am practically penniless, and have no income whatever at present."

"Yes, sir, I understand," he said.

"So you see how impossible your idea is. It is very kind of you; I can't tell you how I appreciate it. But you see how impossible it is."

"I shall not ask any salary, sir," he said, thus making me perceive how much in earnest he was.

My heart warmed toward him. I had always liked Jerome — he was such a model servant; and here he was showing qualities of faithfulness of which I had not dreamed. Yet I felt called to protest, and to refuse his offer.

"Jerome," I said, "even if you should serve me without pay I couldn't do it. I have very little money. It will be as much as I can do to

Digitized by Google

pay my board bill for a while. So I shall have to be my own valet, you see, much as I have valued your services. Mrs. Randolph will still give you employment of some kind, I am sure, and —"

"Mrs. Randolph has left Camden; but it isn't that, sir; it —"

"Left Camden?"

I fairly leaped from my chair.

"Yes, sir," said Jerome, quite undisturbed; "she and Miss Hansborough, and all of them, sir, left this morning."

"For what point?" I asked, trembling.

"I am not sure, sir, but I think Cambridge. They may have gone to New York; but from what I heard I think it is Cambridge. The servants that are left are closing up the house, and will leave this evening."

I was panic-stricken.

"The yacht has gone, too, sir; she sailed an hour ago, with the auto on board, and the —"

"Gone!" I cried. And I know I acted for a minute as if all hope had gone, too.

"Yes, sir," said Jerome, with calm resignation.

"I wish I had known this earlier!"

"I didn't know where you were, sir. I could have gone with them; but, to tell the truth, sir,

Digitized by Google

I didn't want to. I felt that you had been — but it is not for me to express an opinion, sir!"

"Express it!" I commanded.

"Well, sir, it seemed to me you had been treated badly, and I didn't believe the things I heard. You have always been kind to me, sir, before you went away that time when we — that is, I — thought you were dead, and since your return."

Jerome did not credit Lane's statements! He believed in me as Julian Randolph, and now that I was under a cloud he had decided to stand by me, in spite of what it might mean to him. Yet the fact that he believed me to be Julian Randolph, his old master, stung me. I felt humiliated and self-reproachful.

"Jerome," I said, "you overwhelm me with your kindness. I can never repay you. And I must not let you waste your time with me. You will be acting sensibly if you follow Mrs. Randolph by the first train out of Rockland."

He was unmoved by this.

"I want to stay with you, sir," he said, "because I think you will need me. You have not been used to doing things for yourself, sir. When you returned your hair and beard were in a bad condition, if you will pardon my saying it."

Digitized by Google

"But the money!"

"I have quite enough, sir," rising to heroic heights; "I have quite enough for myself, and even for you, in case of need. I have long received a good salary, and your generosity was always great, and I am not a spendthrift. I think, sir, if you will pardon me, that you have been wronged, and —"

"I have been damnably wronged by Courtney Lane," I said, bitterly, "and I'll settle with him for it, if it takes me a lifetime!"

"I should be glad to help you, sir. That is why I stayed, sir, and now offer my services — to help you in that."

"Jerome," I cried, "you are the only gentleman I have met recently. I can't suffer you to serve me as valet, under the conditions, but your friendship and confidence are everything to me. I intend to compass the downfall of Courtney Lane; I know how it is to be done, and I shall yet do it. And I shall —"

I ceased my raving. It was belittling.

If no man is a hero to his valet, here a valet had become a hero in the eyes of his former employer. Jerome seemed to consider the matter settled, so long as my objections did not take the form of a hostile refusal or an angry ejection. He ordered the dress-suit case and

Digitized by Google

the trunk sent up to the room. It was a large trunk, but Jerome's own property. I found soon, however, that it held principally my own belongings, or the belongings I had considered mine.

I was to find at once that Jerome was likely to prove invaluable. I sent him to *The Poplars* to gather up scraps of news, and especially to discover the present destination of Mrs. Randolph; and I asked him to drop in casually at the Bay View and learn what he could of the plans of Courtney Lane.

When he returned he was able to announce definitely that Mrs. Randolph and her sister had departed for Cambridge; which argued that Miss Hansborough and Jack Benson had come to a better understanding than had seemed to exist between them recently, or else that she desired peace with him rather than war. In addition, Jerome brought the startling news that Courtney Lane had left the Bay View. Presumably he, too, had departed from Camden. Naturally, Lane's destination would be New York. Jerome and I alone remained, with the few servants who still delayed at *The Poplars*.

"Find out if Lane has positively left town," I ordered.

"I think he has, sir," was Jerome's opinion.

Digitized by Google

A little later he was able to inform me positively that Lane had left Camden, and that in departing he had remarked to the clerk of the Bay View that he was returning to New York.

"There is a noon train out of Rockland," said Jerome in his report, "and I've no doubt he took that."

"We will take the train out this evening then," I announced.

"Yes, sir," he said; and he began preparations.

When I went down into the hotel lobby to write a telegram my eyes fell on the man who had been with Courtney Lane in that automobile. He was reading a paper, in one of the chairs by the wall, did not look at me, and seemed unaware of my presence.

My telegram was to a New York detective whose name and address I dug out of the New York City directory which I found in the hotel office. I was tired of the delays of Asbury Rand, and resolved to secure another man, in the hope that he would do something. Before leaving the hotel I received an answer from him, assuring me that he would begin work at once, which raised my hopes somewhat.

At Rockland, where we took the train that evening, I again saw Courtney Lane's automobile companion. I lost sight of him at once,

Digitized by Google

however, and felt a sense of relief; but in the morning I discovered that he had occupied a berth in the same sleeping car.

The train landed us at the North Station, in Boston, before daylight; there I lost sight of him, and breathed a sigh of relief. Yet when we went over to Cambridge I saw him again, at the Harvard Square transfer station, where he stood, with his hands in his pockets, looking at the newest novels displayed in a bookstore window. It was all mere chance, I felt sure, yet I was unable to drive away a sense of uneasiness.

We were now in Cambridge, in the very shadow of the University where Jack Benson, so he had declared in jest, had been wrecking his physical system by intense night study and restoring it daily by strenuous baseball exercise. Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough were, we believed, in Cambridge, visiting with a certain Mrs. Clarkson Amory, of Brattle Street. They always visited there when they came to Cambridge, Jerome said. We sought a boarding place as near to it as possible; but the one we found was not on Brattle Street, and too far from there to suit me exactly.

The following morning I again saw Lane's automobile companion in Harvard Square, and

Digitized by Google

shortly afterward encountered Jack Benson near Memorial Hall. I had not yet tried to call on Mrs. Randolph, though I had walked in the darkness with Jerome through quiet Brattle Street and viewed as well as I could the Clarkson Amory residence. My courage was not strong enough to bid me ring the doorbell and seek to see Mrs. Randolph. I meant fully to do that later, perhaps that very day.

As soon as I saw Benson I hurried toward him and called his name. Jerome was not with me at the time. Benson stopped, and then seemed to hesitate as to whether he should stand his ground or run.

"Hello, Benson!" I said. "You don't know how glad I am to see you."

"You here?" he said, his face reddening.

He took my hand when I extended it, but his handshake lacked its former heartiness.

"Yes," I answered. "I'm stopping in Cambridge now. Great old buildings you have; the genuine college air, and all that, you know. One must fight hard not to absorb wisdom here." I tried to speak jocularly. "I presume a Yale man would admit that it's almost the equal of Yale?"

His lips compressed and his gray eyes snapped with sudden fire.

Digitized by Google

"We're going to hang the scalp of Old Eli in the Crimson wigwam this afternoon," he declared, smiling, and with fine enthusiasm.

I had forgotten about that much-talked-of ball game.

"This afternoon?" I said. "Are you in the game?"

"Sure thing!"

His delight made his eyes shine.

"Luck fell my way; the greatest ever, for me, but tough for the other fellow. I was short-stop, you know. Well, the man who took my place was suspended for professionalism, about the time I got back here. He'd played summer ball, for pay. It was hard to get a good short-stop just then, and they couldn't play him; so — well, that's how I got on the team again. I wasn't really out of it so very long, you know; just a few days."

His manner became almost easy, as he recalled these things.

"By the way," I said, "when did you see Miss Hansborough and Mrs. Randolph last? They are here in Cambridge."

He had begun to open up, but at that he closed in his shell like a clam.

He hesitated before answering, then mumbled:

Digitized by Google

"I don't know; that is, I haven't seen 'em lately."

"You knew they were here?"

"Yes; that is — I'd heard so. They have just come."

"You will take Miss Hansborough to see the game, of course?"

"Well, yes; I'll—that is, I'll see that she goes."

He looked at his watch, snapping the case open and shut hurriedly.

"I've got to go," he said. "Wish I could talk longer. But the game, you know —"

He stepped backward, thrusting the watch into his pocket while still speaking, and then turned and fled. Throughout the brief talk his face had been like fire and his manner that of a man being tortured. What did it mean? It could mean nothing, I was sure, but that Benson's mind had been poisoned against me; he no longer believed in me, but thought me an impostor, and desired no further intimacy with me.

The discovery was depressing. It showed apparently that Mrs. Randolph's attitude toward me had not changed; and I felt that if I should now call on her she would refuse to see me.

A few minutes later I encountered Jerome, who had set forth to meet me. The faithful fellow was seldom far from me; in truth he

Digitized by Google

followed me about like a dog, was always at hand when I required any service, and stood ready to run any errand for me at any time. My mind was so taken up with the unpleasant change in Jack Benson that I told Jerome about it.

A Cambridge car passed us bearing on front and rear in big letters notices of the Harvard-Yale game, to be played that afternoon on Soldiers' Field. Those notices inspired Jerome.

"We can attend the game," he said. "Mr. Benson will furnish tickets for Miss Hansborough and Mrs. Randolph, of course, and they will sit together in the Harvard seats. If you wish, sir, I might get tickets that would seat us near them?"

I caught at the suggestion.

"But it won't be easy to get tickets," I objected. "They are issued to students only."

"They can be got very readily," he said. "I can arrange it, sir."

"If you really think you could get seats near them?"

"It can be done, sir. I'll learn from Mr. Benson where the seats are which he has taken."

"Very good," I said, pleased immensely.

Returning alone to our rooms, I found there a Western Union messenger boy with a tele-

Digitized by Google

gram for me. I had left my Cambridge address at the telegraph offices. The telegram had come "Collect," and was addressed to "Julian Randolph." When I tore open the yellow envelope I found a message from the New York detective to whom I had wired from Camden:

"Rand in pay of Lane from the first. Unable to find proofs you want. Pushing investigation."

This was staggering. Asbury Rand in the pay of Courtney Lane from the first! That explained not only his dilatoriness, but why he had done nothing. I saw through it all now; how Lane had even frightened me into that panicky flight on the yacht, by dictating the letters of warning that Rand had sent me, his intention being to scare me into leaving New York and Mrs. Randolph. Heavens! No wonder I had been handicapped. He had fairly played with me. I sat down in a daze.

Digitized by Google

XXIII

CRIMSON AGAINST BLUE

WHEN Jerome came in I showed him the telegram, and a copy of the answer I had sent, in which I urged the detective to increased effort.

"The scoundrel!" he said. "But I don't think much of those detectives, sir. Perhaps the new one is no better than Rand."

"I am sure he must be," I said, trying to rally; "his telegram proves that."

I was confused, and violently angry as well against both Asbury Rand and Courtney Lane. It was as if they had deliberately set a trap for me. Yet it seemed pure chance which had led me to call on Rand. Stop! Was it? I had found his name in a directory in the house on Fifth Avenue, and I recalled that the page was turned down and a pencil mark set against Rand's name. But there were similar pencil marks set against many names in the directory, and some much more noticeable; so that it did not strike me as significant at the time. Yet now I saw that Rand might have been in the

Digitized by Google

employ of Courtney Lane previously, and that at some time Lane might have suggested his name to Mrs. Randolph; what more likely than when she desired to have search made for her missing husband!

Jerome had been successful in getting tickets. The seats were in a good position, in the Harvard section, and not far from those which Benson had secured for Mrs. Randolph and Miss Hansborough. I did not wonder that Miss Hansborough should wish to witness the game, since Benson was to play on the Harvard nine; but that Mrs. Randolph should desire to see it did cause me some surprise. I concluded that she was going at the urgent invitation of her sister, who hoped thus to give her diversion and change of thought.

Filled with the hope of seeing Mrs. Randolph, even though at a distance, my impatience now became feverish. At my urging we set out early, and arrived early. Yet all the way over from Cambridge to Soldiers' Field, beyond the Charles, we were pushed and jostled by people who hurried as if they feared the game would begin before they could get there. And every car that arrived from Boston ejected still more and more people into the struggling mass of humanity at Harvard Square. The amount of

Digitized by Google

enthusiasm that can be evoked by a day before Class Day ball game played by representatives of two great universities is astonishing. Yet Jerome assured me this was as nothing compared with the crowds that came to witness a big game of football.

When we had settled into our seats I observed that there were masses of crimson on our side, and on the other side smaller masses of Yale blue, with traitorous bits of contrary color flecking each, and that before us was a kite-shaped diamond, of green-and-dust color, where the Yale players were already engaged in warming-up practice.

The crimson mass surrounding us writhed and rustled; there was a craning of necks, and a few people stood up, only to draw upon themselves sharp cries of, "Sit down!"

"There they come!" said Jerome.

My heart jumped, for naturally I thought he referred to Mrs. Randolph and her sister, whose coming I had been anxiously awaiting. But it was a procession of Harvard undergraduates marching into the field, led by a brass band.

When they had gallantly cheered Yale they broke up, and the individual members came scampering into the reserved sections. Everywhere crimson and blue flags and banners were

Digitized by Google

waving, and there was much picturesque cheering.

The heaviest cheering came from a Crimson section before which an old man was slowly driving a donkey and cart. The donkey and the cart were roped with crimson; the old man wore a high beaver hat bearing the Harvard H, a waving crimson sash, a crimson band round his arm, and little crimson flags as boutonnières. When the cheering was loudest he stood up, waved his beaver, and yelled in a high, cracked voice, "T'ell with Yale!" It was strange, and suggestive, that old John, the Orange Man, and his donkey and little cart, should receive a greater ovation than even those spectacular undergraduates. At sight of the old mascot one young fellow who sat near me and wore a crimson necktie became temporarily a screeching and purple-faced maniac.

It takes little to amuse people when they wish to be amused. A small bulldog wearing the Yale colors barked at the marching students, and later kept running round the Yale captain as if to weave about him a success spell. That bulldog was a source of vast enjoyment, and brought cheer after cheer from the Yale sections.

But all of this was insignificant compared

Digitized by Google

with the wild roar which arose when the Harvard nine came trotting into the field with their substitutes, for practice. That roar was indescribable, deafening, pandemonium-like. Yet I forgot to listen to it, and scarcely heard the crashing of the bands, followed by the barking college cheers, hardly saw the thousands of flags frantically waving, for Jerome had touched my arm, and there, settling into the seats reserved for them, were Mrs. Randolph and her sister, Mrs. Randolph clothed in some soft dark material and Miss Hansborough in a dress of lighter hue, but each with a touch of crimson.

I became blind temporarily to all other sights, as I watched the face of Mrs. Randolph, a face unnaturally pale, as if from much suffering, yet still to me the most beautiful face in the world. The blue eyes seemed a bit tear-washed, I thought. I was very near her; so near that the close proximity made me tremble. Jerome had chosen his seats well.

What happened after that for a while I do not know clearly. I did not watch the practice; but later I caught a glimpse of the mummery of John, the Orange Man, blessing the plate for Harvard; and, as the game began, I saw that hundreds of little crimson balloons were released amid tremendous Harvard cheering, and went

Digitized by Google

sailing and bobbing defiantly into the Yale-blue sky, an offering no doubt to the god of baseball battles.

After that I heard now and then the crack of bat against ball, the yells, and the wild Comanche chatter of the coachers as they sped a runner from base to base. I heard, too, the songs of the adherents of the Blue and the Crimson as they sought to urge on the contesting nines, and the college cheering from the sections:

"'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! Yale!"

And the challenge flung back with fierce enthusiasm:

"Har—vard! Har—vard! Har—vard! 'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! Har—vard!"

It was noisy, spectacular, like the stadium contests of Greece and Rome. If I had possessed leisure and inclination I might have closed my eyes and seen the Roman nobles and ladies leaning from their balconies of gold and ivory, cheering on the savage fighters in the dusty arena. Now and again a roar broke forth as wolfishly as if thumbs had been turned for the death of an overthrown gladiator.

But I sat looking at Mrs. Randolph, devouring her beauty. Though my heart was filled with a flame of love, the sadness of her face

Digitized by Google

pained me. Not once did she look toward me, and she seemed quite unaware that I was near her. The nut-brown maid had eyes for nothing but those dusty fighters of the diamond. Jerome watched the playing closely, commented occasionally on the conduct of the game or a decision of the umpire, and now and then I heard him swearing softly over something which much displeased him.

Jerome's growing excitement and the rising tone of his comments caused me at length to give more attention to the diamond, and to the men who at brief intervals bobbed up before some Yale or Harvard section and with waving arms led in the set cheering meant to inspire the combating nines.

If both the Yale and Harvard supporters were not confident of victory their cheering and their songs belied them. The Yale sections declared in lusty chorus that Harvard's grave had been dug; and the Harvard sections sang back boastfully that the sun was to set in Crimson, as the sun had set before, for this was Harvard's day. Each side cheered most vociferously and sang loudest when its nine was most in peril. And with it all there was that excitement that made men shiver, though the sun was shining hot from the clear sky of June. Overhead at least

Digitized by Google

Yale's color was dominant, for the sky was a deep blue from horizon to horizon.

From glances at the soiled fighters of the diamond and from Jerome's enlightening comment and soft-voiced anathemas I gathered that matters were going hard with Harvard. The eighth inning had ended amid prodigious excitement, with Harvard last at the bat.

"That was a steal," Jerome was whispering softly. He rubbed his palms together and swung forward in his seat, his shoulders hunched and his head out-thrust. "Oh, that was a steal!"

He touched my arm.

"Did you see that — that slide of Benson's in the sixth? He brought a runner in, with a homer; ball in deep centre — fielder had to fish for it in the grass like a boy hunting for a lost marble; and all the time Benson was flying. He made a great slide — a great slide; and I'll swear that he put his fingers on the plate before the ball touched him. But the umpire declared him out."

He clicked his heels together and rocked to and fro in his agony. The flush on his face had deepened from rosy pink almost to Harvard crimson.

"How is the score?" I asked.

Digitized by Google

Not that I cared; I was thinking of Mrs. Randolph, of the sadness of her face, of its beauty, too, in spite of its sadness; and I was resolving that I would defeat Courtney Lane, and would yet win, first her confidence, and then her love. What was it to me, if Yale or Harvard led? But I asked the question.

"Seven to five, in favor of Yale," said Jerome.

He almost groaned.

"Ah! they're making a kick about that! Well, they ought to, sir; they ought to throw that umpire off the grounds. I'd like to go down and punch him. Too bad!" he added, with a sigh. "He has ruled against them."

He turned to me.

"Did you see that catch Benson made at short, in the seventh?"

"No," I said, "I wasn't looking."

A shade of reproach passed quickly over his face.

"It was great, sir — absolutely the finest thing I ever saw!" He struck his hands together by way of emphasis. "The ball went hot off the bat, like a bullet, over the head of the pitcher. Benson jumped into the air and nailed it, and shot it to first like lightning as soon as his feet touched the ground. And he caught the runner

Digitized by Google

before he could get back to the bag. It put two men out!"

He rubbed his palms together and rocked his body.

"Benson has been covering himself with glory to-day," he added. "It makes me proud of him, sir."

In the ninth Yale failed to put a single man on first; the only one who came near reaching it Benson put out with a short-arm throw. The feverishness of the excitement that followed made its effects felt even on me, uninterested as I had been. And then, when a run was made, and, with two men out and a runner on first, Benson came to the bat, I felt my pulses jumping for the first time.

Jerome's face had gone white again. I glanced at Mrs. Randolph, who was as impassive as ever, and at Miss Hansborough. The eagerness of the nut-brown maid was palpable. She sat leaning forward, red lips apart, eyes shining, and with cheeks as crimson as the flag she bore or the crimson roses that adorned her hat.

Jerome began again to swear softly, as strikes were called. Then to my ears, in the strange hush that fell over all those thousands of eager spectators, came the words of the umpire, his voice trembling:

Digitized by Google

"Two strikes — three balls!"

A quiver ran through the Harvard benches, like wind rustling through dry tree branches. Some electric thrill of sympathy made my tense nerves quiver. The next ball that came whirling in from the hand of the pitcher might settle it. If it was a fair ball and Benson did not get it Yale would be the victor.

I saw the ball come in, and I heard Benson's bat collide with it. It was a sharp, clear crack.

As he thus drove the ball, and jumped toward first, while the runner from first ran toward second, all those seated Harvard thousands sprang up in a screaming, yelling mass, with flags, hats, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, fluttering and waving. I leaped to my feet, waving my hat and yelling with the others. The nut-brown maid was fluttering her crimson flag deliriously. Jerome at my side was shouting like a madman. A wild roar rolled over the field. Fielders were scampering, coachers screeching; and Benson, chasing the runner before him, was going round the diamond as if he wore the winged slippers of Mercury. I had not dreamed the fellow could run so. The man ahead of him came in, tying the score.

"Go home!" Jerome screamed, waving his hat, as Benson passed third and turned for the

Digitized by Google

plate. "They can't get you — go home! Good boy! Oh, you Lulu! G-o h-o-m-e!"

He stamped on the seat, and then jumped up and down in his frenzy. In the midst of that bedlam Benson crossed the home plate, with the ball following him closely; and then —

The benches cracked under Jerome and me, and I slipped and pitched downward. Jerome caught at me, but missed, and I landed on my head and shoulders. The game had ended victoriously for Harvard. For me had come the blackness and blankness of sudden unconsciousness.

Digitized by Google

XXIV

A METAMORPHOSED PAST

I DO not know the workings of the mind of Napoleon after his defeat at Waterloo; I am far from being a Napoleon. But when I felt that the Fates had done their worst against me I was weak, uncourageous, crushed. Not having the rashly heroic disposition which in times of disaster drove the Ancients to the hemlock, I desired only seclusion and inattention from every one. Cowper's remote and "boundless contiguity of shade" would have suited my sick fancy exactly.

I had returned to consciousness with this feeling in a room in the house on Brattle Street, though at the time I was fully convinced that I was in a hospital. I had been in hospitals — one I recalled distinctly; and the atmosphere is unmistakable. In addition, as if more proof were needed, a white-capped and white-aproned nurse stood by my bed.

"You are better," she said.

She gave me something from a spoon, which I swallowed without protest, and went away.

Digitized by Google

If it was a soothing draught it failed of its effect; I became even more wide awake, and more depressed, as the drama of recent events unrolled to my memory.

One thing I recalled with especial clearness was that telegram from New York which I had received just before the ball game:

"Rand in pay of Lane from the first. Unable to find proofs you want. Pushing investigation."

Another thing so burned into my memory that I could never forget it was that scene in Camden when Mrs. Randolph turned me from her door. I had hoped to overthrow Lane, and to win her. It was clear to me now that I could do neither. Indeed the selfishness of the efforts I had made appalled me. They seemed sure proof of that deterioration of the moral fibre which inevitably punishes the wrongdoer.

I was not only weak and unnerved, deserted of courage, but my conscience was frightfully awake and loud-voiced. It seemed to me that I had not only acted the part of a poltroon, but that the egotism which had made me believe Mrs. Randolph, after an understanding of my baseness and duplicity, could accept me in the

Digitized by Google

place of the husband she had loved and lost was monumental and bordered on the delusions of the insane.

I wondered if Mrs. Randolph had been to see me since I had been brought to this place, and I regretted I had not asked the attendant. Jerome had been there, I was sure, and would come again. But now I did not want to see even Jerome. For that overpowering feeling that I had been wrong — fatally, foolishly, wickedly wrong — from the first, combined with a strange and sickening sense of defeat, made me wish to see no one who had known in any way of my ill-guided and ill-starred attempt.

In this period of depression, wild thoughts of flight came to me, which crystallized into a desire to hide myself amid the scenes of my childhood; I suffered from the intense longing of homesickness. The waving trees and green fields; the roadsides, which in this month of June were pink with masses of wild roses; the cool, leafy lanes; the pools of water under the pollard willows, where in the heat of the day the cows used to stand; the long village street, with the white church spire rising at the end of it; the country store and the post office, with their groups of gossipers and loungers, — I saw them all.

Digitized by Google

The desire for flight, for seclusion, for a backward leap into a past that might to some extent take me away from the present, that might somehow, I did not know how, sprinkle me with perfumes from Lethean waters, grew until at last I arose from my bed.

I was not so weak as I had thought, and desire gave me strength. I found the window, and looked out into the night shadows and at the flashing lamps of the street. The surroundings were unfamiliar.

My clothing was within reach of my hand. I dressed hastily; and then slipped from the room, down the broad stairs, and out into the night, without discovery. I daresay I was mad, raving mad, as a result of that fall.

As I wandered on I saw that I was in Cambridge, and directed my way toward Harvard Square. In my purse, undisturbed, was my small store of money, and at a restaurant I bought a roll and coffee. Then I took a car for the South Station, in Boston, and was well launched on my wild journey.

When, shortly before morning, I arrived in the town of Walesby and sought a hotel, I was distressed by the changes I beheld. Time had wrought sad havoc. All the old landmarks were gone.

Digitized by Google

"You are not well," said the night clerk, looking at me sharply when I asked for a room.

"Not very strong," I said, "as the result of a recent injury, but I am not ill. The old Densford House stood on this site originally, did it not?"

He stared at me. He was a young man, with bristling moustache and bright eyes.

"I don't know," he said; "I never heard that it did."

I observed that he gave me curious glances as he conducted me to my room.

I slept scarcely at all; and was out before sunrise, hurrying along the street which I was sure would bring me to familiar scenes. But I was not led to them. The sun came up out of a wide flat, where I had looked for hills. With a feeling of bewilderment I went on. The "o-ca-lee" of red-winged blackbirds drew me to a clump of willows. The water was stagnant and fetid; the clear spring had apparently been choked, and the cool and trickling brook where as a boy I had waded barefoot was not there.

I looked about for the hills of my childhood. Springs may become choked and brooks may dry up, trees may be cut down, highways may be changed, but the hills are eternal. Yet the

Digitized by Google

hills of my fancy, sun-bright when the red morning touched their tops, purple, gold, and silver when the evening shadows marched phalanx-like up the cool valleys, were not there. Hills there never had been in that place. The land was a flat! Nor were there any hills about the town; not even the little hills which Fancy, reaching youthward, may with the aid of deceptive memory magnify into large ones.

A sudden terror shook me. I quaked under a new thought, that Imagination, insidiously inserting itself in the place of Memory and passing itself off as such, had tricked me. I began to awake to the terrible discovery that I had merely fancied this town of Walesby to be my birthplace; and that the hills, the roads, the pleasant brook, and all, were but the creations of a capsized imagination. And as this rushed upon me I was frightened and transfixed by another thought. It seemed to come as a remembered portion of a fevered dream which had troubled me as I tossed on that bed in the house in Cambridge. It was that *I* was the only one who had from the first been deceived; and that *I was Julian Randolph!*

With the inrush of this sudden conviction strange memories assailed me. The recent past grew hazy, and showing through it like islands

Digitized by Google

seen through a mist came recollections that amazed and bewildered me. Was I, could I be, Julian Randolph?

"Julian!"

I heard the name called. It was like a voice from that other, that submerged, past. On hearing it I turned. Mrs. Randolph was in the road, hurrying with quick steps toward me. With her were Jack Benson and Jerome. They had — I saw it now — discovered my flight, and had followed in hot haste.

My brain spun round. There was a noise in my head like the loud humming of a top. That noise ended in a roaring explosion. And again I was as unconscious as when I fell to the ground at the ball field.

Digitized by Google

XXV

LOVE AND THE SOUL-SLEEPERS

MRS. RANDOLPH was reading to me. I despair of conveying to any one by the use of mere type and paper an idea of the charm of her voice when she read — low, soft, well modulated, yet with a vibrant, bell-like quality. It soothed me to hear it.

The book from which she read was Pinchot's "Mysteries of the Mind." It was a strange book, filled with records so strange that only one conversant with the revelations of psychology could credit them.

As Mrs. Randolph read I watched her with loving fondness. The pallor was gone from her face; health, contentment, happiness were revealed in it. And it was as beautiful as I had dreamed. The clear-cut features, the white forehead and brilliant complexion, the rounded throat, the soft brown hair with its gleam of sunshine, the sweet blue eyes, and lips made for love and kisses — I noted them all. Thus noting and listening I almost forgot at times the strangeness of the things she read.

Digitized by Google

"That is a queer case," I said; "read that again, please."

"Very much like your own, Julian."

Pinchot was expounding his theories of the "Sub-Conscious Mind" and telling of that singular mental cataclysm by which all previous recollections are buried under new and imaginary ones.

"The former ego," read Mrs. Randolph, "is apparently extinguished, and another (we cannot call it a new one, for it previously existed) supplants it. The man is thus, as to his mental states, wholly another being. While he is to the eye of the beholder the same man, he does not himself know it. Nor does he know of the change in himself. His past is to him as if it had never existed. He does not recognize, or know, those who were his former friends. They are strangers to him. He recognizes only those whom he has known and associated with in his new condition of existence; and he knows (that is, recalls) others, who are but inhabitants of the chimerical past he has created for himself, a past which would otherwise be a blank. Sometimes (often indeed) the past *is* a blank. With this manufactured past (if I may so call it) serving, and deceiving him, as real memories, he constructs for himself a new life, begins per-

Digitized by Google

haps a new profession, assumes a new name, which he fancies has been always his, and does not for an instant dream even that this is so. If a married man he perhaps marries again, not knowing that he is already married. Should he even meet his wife he, in all probability, would not recognize her, nor could he be made to believe that she was his wife, or that he had ever met her before. But if recognition came, then his submerged ego would instantly reassume control, and he would be as a man aroused from a trance; then the new life he had been living would itself become a blank, the new acquaintances would be no more remembered as belonging to that period; and in fact all that he had thought and done would be as a sentence or a page of writing erased from a slate. This is usually the case; yet there are well-authenticated instances where a man thus restored is able to recall not only this new and usually forgotten past, but recalls also, the same as a mind which has not known this submergence, the events of his previous life, such as every man remembers."

She closed the book, with her finger between the pages.

"Doctor Thompson saw that you were in just that state." A hint of tears came to the blue eyes. "And, Julian, you don't know what

Digitized by Google

it cost me, when I tried to carry out his orders there in Camden, after he had reached the conclusion that a violent mental shock might arouse you to the old life. I am a poor actress I'm afraid, for I came near breaking down when I made that pretence of believing you to be the impostor you thought yourself, and ordered you from the house."

Impulsively I put out my hand and took her free one in it, giving it a warm pressure.

"But I was willing to try anything," she added. "I was so afraid though that you would do something violent, would kill yourself perhaps, that I stipulated a man must be set to watch you every minute."

"Yes, I recall him well enough," I said; "that was the fellow who rode with Lane in the auto, and shadowed me after I reached Boston and Cambridge. But I thought Lane had hired him."

She looked at me with a radiant smile.

"I fear that your love for me was not as strong as you claimed, you pretender; for you never once tried to commit suicide. And all my fine acting went for nothing, too; for if Jerome hadn't gone insane at the ball game and broken the seat you would still be claiming to me that you are not Julian Randolph."

Digitized by Google

"I should still be madly in love with you, whatever I was or did," I declared, lifting her hand to my lips with an impulsive motion. "I think Pinchot does not hit my case in one way; for I'm sure it was memory — a queer sort, perhaps — which caused me to fall wildly in love with you when I saw you there in the carriage in Central Park."

She pouted her lips prettily.

"So you don't think you could have fallen in love with me if there hadn't been a memory of that previous love?"

"Of course; I'd have fallen in love with you anyway, any time, anywhere. You are the one woman ordained for me from the foundation of the world."

"Don't be so sure, Julian," she said. "If the half of what Pinchot says is true we can never be sure of anything."

Yet she was pleased.

"No matter what Pinchot says, I am sure I'm the happiest man alive!"

"And I the happiest woman."

I drew the bright head down to where I lay half reclining, and kissed her.

"Kitty," I said, "I love you!"

She threw her arms round me.

"And I love you — love you — love you!"

Digitized by Google

Courtney Lane was not such a bad lot after all, I discovered. As the instructor to whom he had been introduced in Philadelphia, he was not ready to believe that I could be Julian Randolph. I confess that inasmuch as I did not myself believe it he had grounds for his disbelief. I think he really did unload some copper stocks on my wife at an unseemly high figure; but he did not attempt any direct swindling, or other financial jugglery, so far as I could learn. But I am convinced, and always shall be, that he was in love with my wife. That was not her fault, God bless her! No man could be long acquainted with her and not love her; and he would be less than a man if, thinking her a widow, he did not wish to marry her.

I have forgiven him for that Philadelphia business. I did spend a couple of months in the Gilbert Porter Institute as an instructor while I was roaming about under the impression that my alter ego was my first and only ego, and Julian Randolph had retired temporarily to that strange and mystical land of the Sub-Conscious. Randolph was completely avalanched at the time, poor fellow; that fall from the wharf at Camden did it, Doctor Thompson believes, and I am sure. But I have such a grip on him now that he is not likely

Digitized by Google

ever to leave me again. Doctor Thompson is as wise as I once thought him foolish.

Mrs. Trencher I have also forgiven. I know I can never learn to like the widening flash of her black eyes; but she is not to blame for that perhaps, nor for her peppery temper and over-masterful manner. Years of teaching and other years of mission work taking one into contact with inferior minds will have their effect.

I find it strangely hard to forgive Asbury Rand. He might have informed me that he had been employed previously by Lane. The confidences I bestowed on him when I did not know that were as if they had been purloined from me. And that he should have deceived me so, and aided Lane while professing to serve me, was black treachery. Still, I try to be generous even to Asbury Rand. In my new happiness I feel that I can afford to be generous and forgiving to the whole world.

While my wife was reading to me from Pinchot's admirable book Jerome passed the door.

"Jerome was himself a wonderfully clever actor at that time," I said, as the sound of his footsteps died away. "I really thought he had left you, and had not the remotest idea that you had instructed him to remain close by me and help me in every way I demanded, and that you

Digitized by Google

supplied the money which he was so anxious to spend on me. I really did not credit him with such cleverness."

She looked at me with eyes strangely shining.

"Can you think for an instant that I would send you away from our house in Camden without any one to look out for you, or care for you?"

"He acted his part with marvellous skill," I said. "Really, he would not do badly on the stage."

"I think we all had some excellent lessons in acting about that time," she said, smiling again; "not only Jerome and myself, but Margaret and Jack Benson, and even the chauffeur and the servants."

Miss Hansborough came into the room with a girlish flutter, carrying a stack of envelopes which she had been addressing. She was the same cheery, athletic, nut-brown maid. I did not wonder that Benson adored her.

He had received his "sheepskin" from Harvard soon after his wonderful work on the diamond. I tell him in jest sometimes that he would not have been given a degree but for that!

The addressed envelopes were to convey to her friends announcements of her approaching

Digitized by Google

wedding. She was radiantly happy as she asked advice and showed some of the addresses to her sister.

But not even Miss Hansborough nor Jack Benson (no, not even when they stood together in Grace Church and were married!) was happier than I, nor happier than the lovely woman who is my wife. For ours was a reunion which bound more closely and firmly than can any new tie.

THE END.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Mr. Whitson's First Western Novel

BARBARA
A WOMAN OF THE WEST

By JOHN H. WHITSON

Illustrated by C. C. Emerson. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50

"We are carried from one scene to another with an ease and expeditiousness that plainly betokens the author's familiarity with the length and breadth of the Western country, and the people he so vividly portrays," says the *San Francisco News-Letter*.

Barbara, the heroine of Mr. Whitson's first Western novel, is the loyal wife of a self-centred man of literary tastes, living on a ranch in Kansas. "Barbara is a fresh, breezy sort of a girl; and the account of her life and ultimate happiness, as described by Mr. Whitson, makes one of the best stories of the season," says the *St. Paul Globe*.

Hon. John D. Long, ex-Secretary of the Navy, in a letter to the author, says: "You have the story-teller's art. I like especially those portions of the book which treat of Western scenes and life — the homestead, the plain, the prairie, the pioneer's experience, the mining camp, Cripple Creek, and Pike's Peak. You bring out the growth of the country, the speculative ups and downs, the mountain curves of the narrow railroads; and the winter scene with the dangerous trip over the mountain from Feather Bow is very graphic."

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS

254 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON

Digitized by Google

A Stirring Tale of the Plains

THE RAINBOW CHASERS

By JOHN H. WHITSON

Author of "Barbara, A Woman of the West"

FULL of the atmosphere of the West, with Dick Brewster, alias Jackson Blake, cowboy, land speculator, and lover, for its hero, Mr. Whitson's new novel, without being in the least a copy, has many of the attractions of Mr. Wister's hero, "The Virginian."

"The Rainbow Chasers" is a virile American novel with its principal scenes laid in Western Kansas during the land boom of '85. The male characters are vigorous men, with red blood in their veins; and the heroine, Elinor Spencer, is a high-spirited but lovable Western girl.

The Brooklyn Eagle says: —

"It is a picturesque narrative, striking in its portrayal of conditions that have vanished. It is one of those works of fiction which, like 'The Virginian,' deserve to rank as books of social and economic history, because of the picturing of conditions, vital while they existed, that have passed away."

With 6 illustrations by Arthur E. Becher. 393 pages. 12mo. Decorated cloth, $1.50.

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS, BOSTON

At all Booksellers'

Digitized by Google

A Colorado romance, full of action

JUSTIN WINGATE, RANCHMAN

By JOHN H. WHITSON

Author of "The Rainbow Chasers," etc.

Illustrated by Arthur E. Becher. 318 pages. 12mo. $1.50

A timely, unusual, and striking story, full of action.—*Chicago Inter-Ocean.*

The love story is one of the sweetest told in any novel of recent days.—*St. Louis Star.*

It may be called a "reconstruction novel" of ranch existence, for it deals with a new phase of Western life and presents the cowboy in a new character. The writer has not only the story-teller's art of holding the attention, but he has a thorough knowledge of his subject, and presents an accurate and adequate picture of the Western life of the day — its purpose and significance and possibilities.—*New York Sun.*

There are many extremely thrilling situations in the story and they are skilfully handled.—*Boston Transcript.*

Takes one among very real people, placed in genuinely human situations.—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS, BOSTON

At all Booksellers'

Digitized by Google

"Shows Mr. Oppenheim at his Best"

THE MALEFACTOR

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "A Maker of History," etc. Illustrated by F. H. Townsend. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50

A new Monte Cristo. Every page fascinates. — *Brooklyn Citizen.*

Spirited, vigorous, mysterious, and, best of all, well-told. — *Boston Transcript.*

Possesses literary merit far above what is usually associated with this kind of fiction. — *Philadelphia Press.*

One of those fascinating stories which grips tightly the deepest interest of the reader and holds on until the strange tale is complete. — *Syracuse Herald.*

Nothing that he has yet produced compares with "The Malefactor" in point of sheer, absorbing interest. — *St. Paul Pioneer Press.*

Constructed with the skill in development of plot and exciting interest of which the author is an acknowledged master. — *The Outlook*, New York.

A story of the strange revenge of Sir Wingrave Seton, who suffered imprisonment for a crime he did not commit rather than defend himself at a woman's expense. — *Toledo Blade.*

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS

254 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON

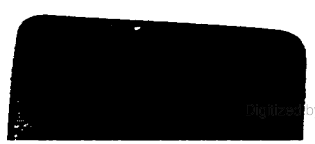
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google